

Akinerdem, Zeyneb Feyza (2015). Marriage safe and sound: subjectivity, embodiment and movement in the production space of television in Turkey. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, City University London)



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MARRIAGE SAFE AND SOUND:
Subjectivity, Embodiment and Movement in the Production
Space of Television in Turkey

Zeyneb Feyza Aknerdem

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at City University London

City University London
Department of Culture and Creative Industries

October, 2015



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AK Parti	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi	Justice and Development Party
RTÜK	Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu	Radio and Television Supreme Council
TRT	Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu	Turkish Radio and Television Institute
TÜRGEV	Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı	The Foundation for Services and Education for Youth

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

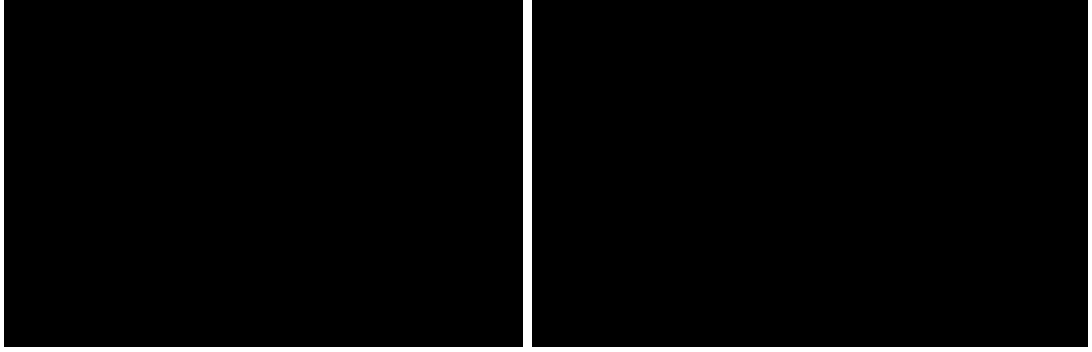
This is an ethnographic study of a television show titled *Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle* (Marry Me on the Esra Erol Show), the most popular of the televised matchmaking formats in Turkey since it premiered in 2007. The marriage show is part of the daytime flow of television broadcasting in Turkey that, as an entertainment format, sets the everyday rhythms of life and provides content for debates/judgements on – as well as being an increasingly popular route to – marriage.

I explore the marriage show as a reality show format, which is an outcome of the global flow of media images, narratives and genres. As such, it is a television show that translates the neoliberal imaginary of *the self* as an aspect of subjectivity in search of survival, security and happiness, into the Turkish context. What distinguishes the marriage show from other reality show formats is that it orients the self towards the desire and expectation to get married as a means of survival. To explore *marriage* as an orientation of the self through television, I contextualise the show within the contemporary practices, policies and debates of the family in Turkey.

By deploying the concept of *frame*, I investigate how the format is produced by normatively framing the narratives of the participants as marriageable subjects, while also registering the show as a quality program which is *seriously* dedicated to marrying people within the norms and conventions of marriage in Turkey. Taking the production space of the marriage show as the field of research, and female subjectivity as the particular focus, this study is an endeavour to show how practices, tensions and sensibilities pertaining to marriage and family in Turkey produce female subjects, bodies, self-narratives and movements across the intense present of television production.

PROLOGUE

Esra Erol Show, ATV, January 10, 2013



Ferah: *It was my mom who saw Umut first. Two days later, I saw him by chance. We then showed him to each other.*

Voice-over: *Two special names and a fabulous meeting! (Same words in captions)*

Umut: *I would like to have a tea with Ferah.*

Voice-over: *Umut and Ferah's surprise decision is now on Esra Erol Show!*

Figure 1-1: *Teaser, Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle, ATV, January 10, 2013.*

In the last minute of the teaser on the screen, the studio director begins to count down in the studio. The director rushes out to the control room. The studio director asks everybody (the marriage candidates and the studio audience) to stand up and applaud, as she counts down: '10-9-8-...2-1'. The live broadcast runs.

The candidates and the studio audience stand up and cheer. The lights flash, and the orchestra begins to play an upbeat song. Everybody is so lively and joyful. The jimmy-jib camera moves extremely fast. The five cameras in the studio focus on the orchestra, the audience, the candidate seats simultaneously, while the director selects the sprightliest images to be transmitted to the home audience.

The host, Esra Erol cheerfully enters the stage and dances modestly with the music. She glances at the studio audience, the orchestra and the cameras occasionally while dancing. When the song finishes, she welcomes the studio and viewing audiences with

her most cheerful voice: *‘Welcome! My dear viewers in front of the screen, and my guests in the studio’*.

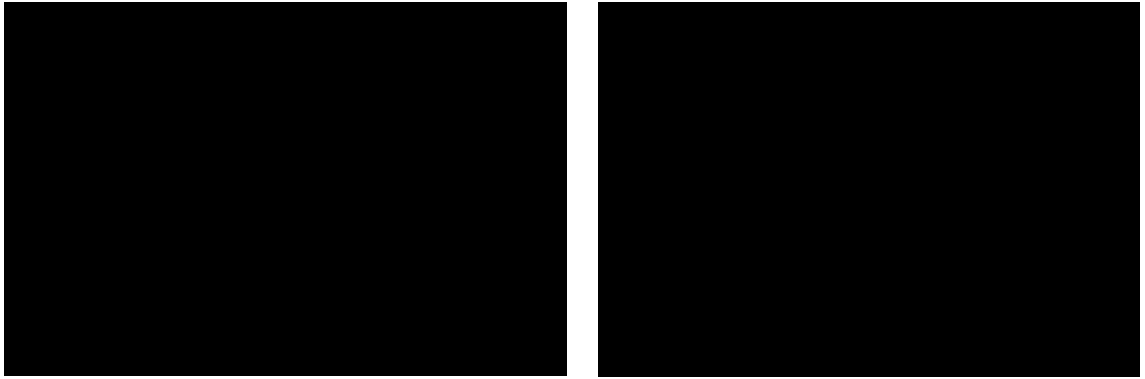


Figure 1-2: *The lights flash, the orchestra begins to play an upbeat song.*

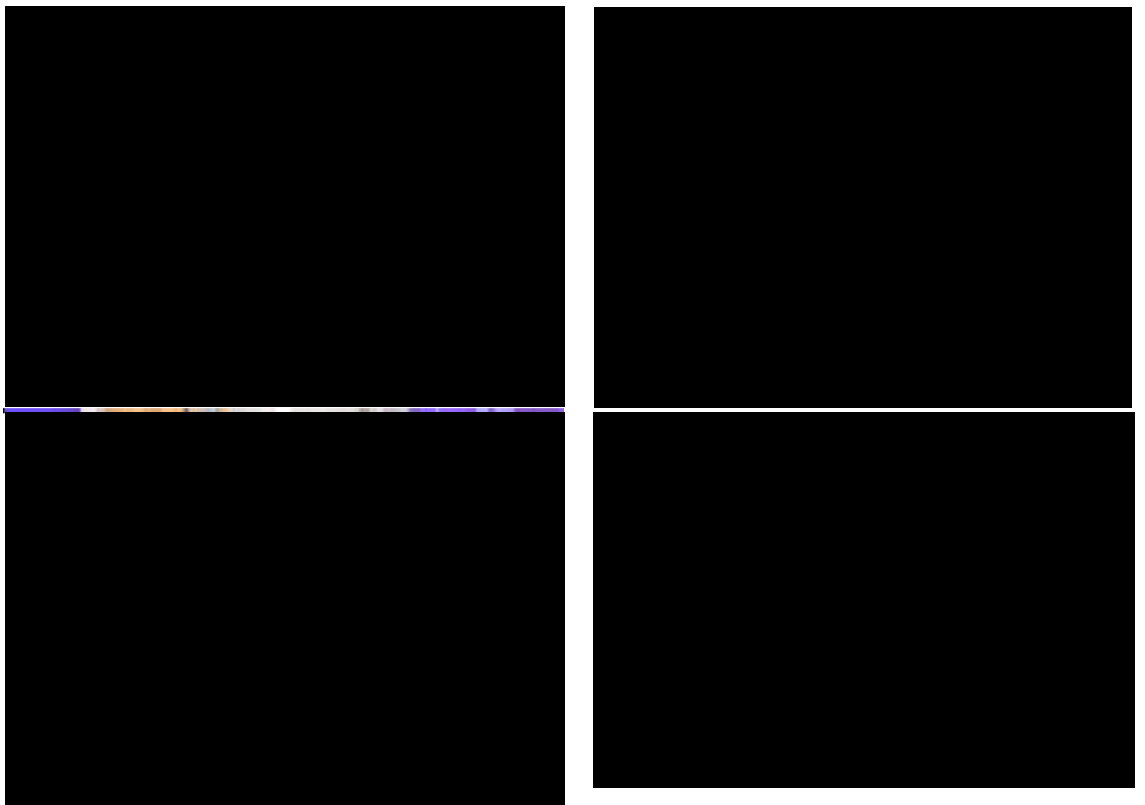


Figure 1-3: *Esra Erol enters the stage. The orchestra plays an upbeat song. The studio audience stands up and applauds.*

She seems joyful and energetic as she moves on the stage while talking. She thanks for flowers and gifts coming from the studio audience. One of the gifts is a hand-made basket full of greeting cards coming from a group of audience members, with the notes

blessing and greeting her success and beauty. She randomly selects and reads some of these notes: *‘Esra Erol brings good luck to the TV screens’*, *‘Let the evil eye be away from the beauty of the screens’*, and lots of other messages blessing and greeting her success and beauty. *‘I keep these letters not for myself but for my son. I want to give him an inspiration to do good things in life like myself’*, she says.

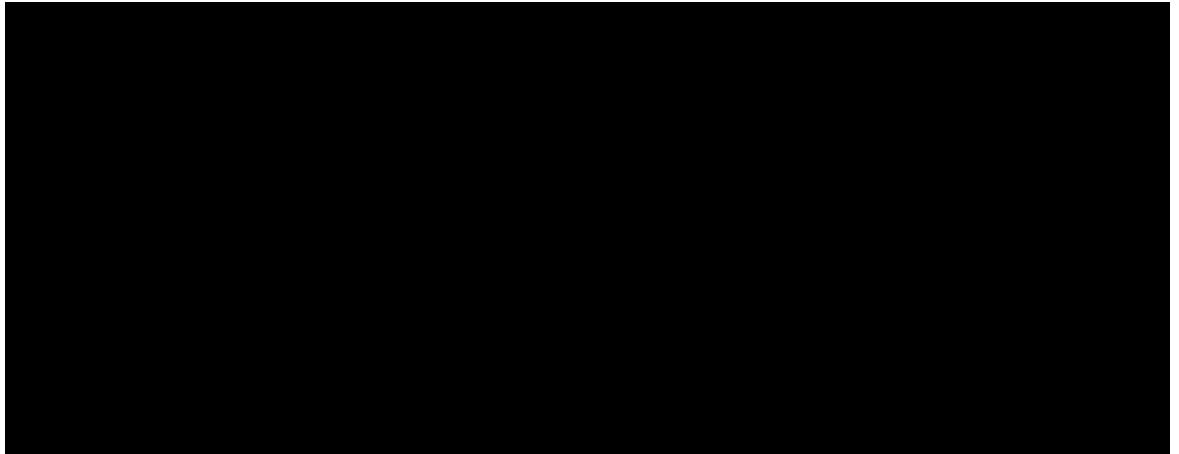


Figure 1-4: *Esra Erol reads the audience letters.*

She then announces the first guest of the day, a female participant who is in search of her soulmate in the show. The door at the back of the stage opens, and Meltem, a beautiful young woman enters the stage with applause and upbeat music. The camera zooms into young woman’s face, then zooms out to show the whole stage. Esra shakes Meltem’s hand, kindly offers her one of the two seats on the stage, and she herself takes the other one. A camera focuses on the two women on the stage, the music stops, Esra Erol glances at her notes, to tease Meltem’s story out.

After around fifteen minutes of conversation with Meltem, which includes Meltem’s tragic life story narrated in a dramatic tone, and her expectations about marriage, she leaves the stage, while a new candidate comes in accompanied by applause and music.



Figure 1-5: Esra Erol and Meltem takes the seats on the stage.

Like all other broadcast days, the marriage show's stage hosts a variety of guests: single men and women who come and announce their willingness to get married, those who come to the show as suitors, those who are already in the show and who are dating outside the show, those who want to resolve the problems they encounter throughout courtship, those who were married in the show and who visit Esra Erol to show their gratitude. These guests enter the stage according to a flow prepared just before the show and occasionally updated according to the newly added suitors and immediate changes in the planned broadcast. Throughout my visits, I felt that the program staff were creating a new show every single day, with very few patterns and sequences that help them pre-schedule the show.

The show is based on hosting as many guests as possible throughout one episode – individuals who come to the show to find marriage partners. The host keeps inviting candidates and suitors until the last minute of the show, and usually she closes the episode in the middle of a performance: i.e. a candidate's narration, or just before the folding screen opens for the first meeting of a candidate and a suitor. These last-minute

appearances constitute the cliffhanger of the show, which is expected to anchor the audiences' attention and invite them to watch the next episode.



Figure 1-6: Esra Erol closes the episode, salutes the audience and leaves the stage.

The studio seems lively and sparkling throughout the live broadcast. The live show lasts around 3 hours, commercial breaks included. The candidates and the suitors enter the stage from the doors located at the rear front of the stage. The cameras zoom in faces of candidates and suitors as they come on to the stage with music and applauses, and zoom out when the folding screen opens and they see each other first time on the stage. The five cameras around the stage quickly move, zoom in and out to fully cover all sides of the stage: the candidate seats, the audience seats, the orchestra, the host and the guests (candidates and suitors), to transmit the lively atmosphere of the studio to the home audience.

Meanwhile, the orchestra keeps track of the mood of the studio and Esra Erol's energetic movements on the stage as the guests of the show come on to the stage throughout the show. They play a variety of songs as inspired by the candidates' stories and emotional revelations. They accompany the opening of doors, and keep the broadcast energetic throughout the three hours of live show. All guests bring their life stories and

their future expectations onto the stage, as well as their spontaneous feelings (i.e. excitements and disappointments) about a new relationship, engagement and marriage, which constitute the main ingredient of the show, and which make me feel that I am attending a wedding ceremony full of joy and happiness, and simultaneously witnessing a therapy session full of tears and emotional revelations. The show is produced out of tensions and ambiguities between grief, joy, love, anger, trust and suspicion that are part and parcel of accounts of life and encounters of marriage.

Here I have tried to present a summary of a three hours live broadcast of the marriage show, which is the object of this study. Before stepping into my analysis, I wanted to give the reader the sense of (emotional) ambiguity I described above. All in all, this study is an attempt to draw the pathway through which the stage of the marriage show is set, which is full of this kind of ambiguous feeling on the researcher's part, as well as for other subjects of the show (the production staff, the host, the participants and the audiences). You will read a monograph which carry out its own ambiguities, while creating an account of the marriage show - i.e. a reality show format which claims to resolve these kind of ambiguities for its participants, and initiate happy marriages as an end result.

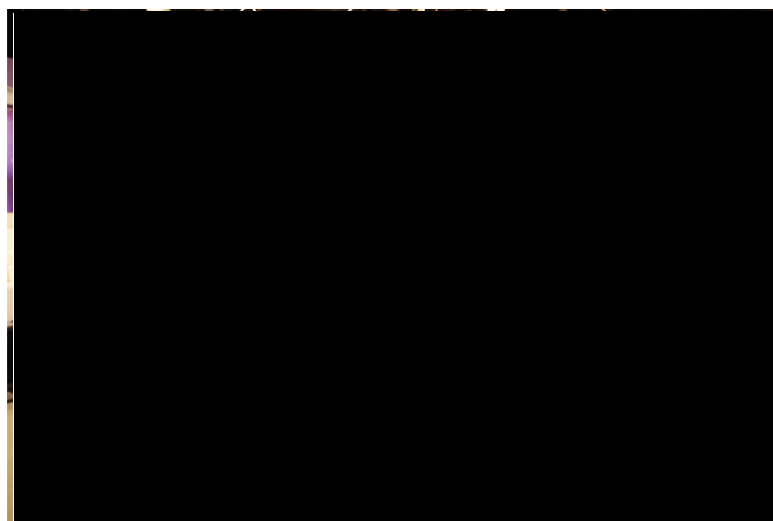


Figure 1-7: In the field.

PART -1- SETTING THE STAGE

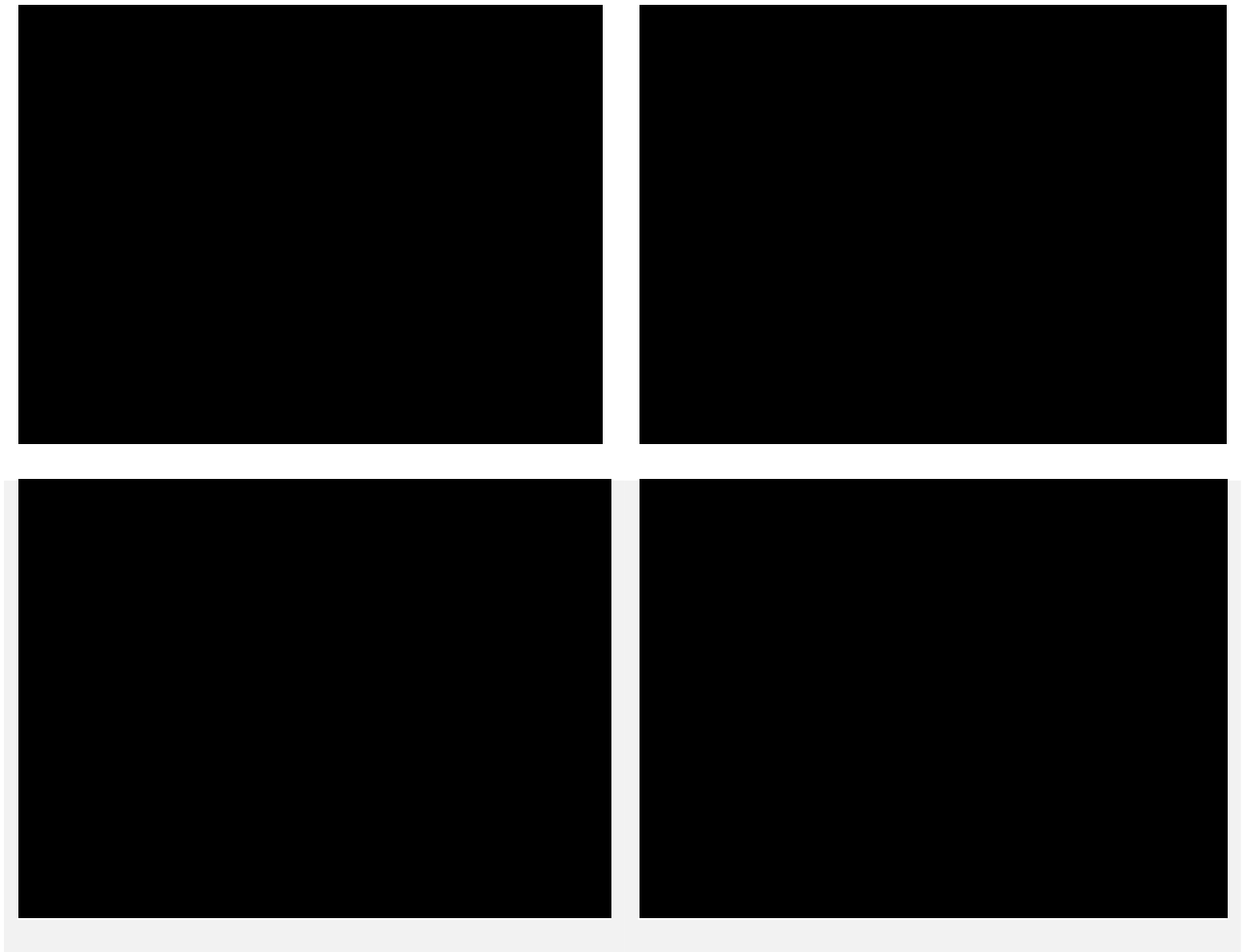


Figure 1-8: Stills captured from the opening titles of the show 'Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle'.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The object of this ethnographic study is the marriage show¹ (*evlenme/izdivaç programı*), which has been a popular reality show format since it premiered in 2007, targeting a wide range of Turkish-speaking audiences not only in Turkey but also in regional/global mediascape of Turkish television broadcasting. The first marriage show was produced for Flash TV, a national broadcast network which is known for cheap entertainment and reality show programming, and the format rapidly proliferated on mainstream national networks, with various titles and hosts. The most renowned and long-lasting of these is known by the name of its host: the Esra Erol show. The title has changed more than once since it first aired in 2007, at the time of this research, the show was called *Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle* (Marry Me on the Esra Erol Show) on ATV, one of the mainstream television networks in Turkey, which broadcasts to some European and Middle Eastern countries as well.

The marriage show is a reality show format dedicated to marrying people on TV. Participants apply to the show with the expectation of finding someone to eventually marry. They first call the show, and if they are accepted, they come to the stage as *candidates* and narrate their personal histories on stage, along with their expectations for marriage before finally an open call is put out for suitors. Interested viewers call in to the show expressing their willingness to meet the candidate, and then if invited by the candidate or accepted by the show's staff, he/she comes on the show as a *suitor*. The candidate can (and usually does) meet more than one suitor, one by one, before deciding to continue meeting with one of them outside of the program. After a time, they return to the show and describe their experiences and intentions regarding a possible relationship. The candidate and the suitor may either decide to continue dating/courting or break up. If

¹ Hereafter I occasionally call it simply 'the show'.

they break up, they may either leave the show or continue meeting other suitors/candidates. These are essential rules of the format: candidates and suitors may not schedule meetings or make relationship-related decisions outside the purview of the show; for example, they may not decide to live together. If they decide to marry, the engagement and marriage ceremonies also take place during the live broadcast. The program is solely dedicated to the pursuit of marriage, and all other relationship types between couples who meet through the show are forbidden.



Figure 1-9: A couple waiting for their engagement ceremony at the backstage.

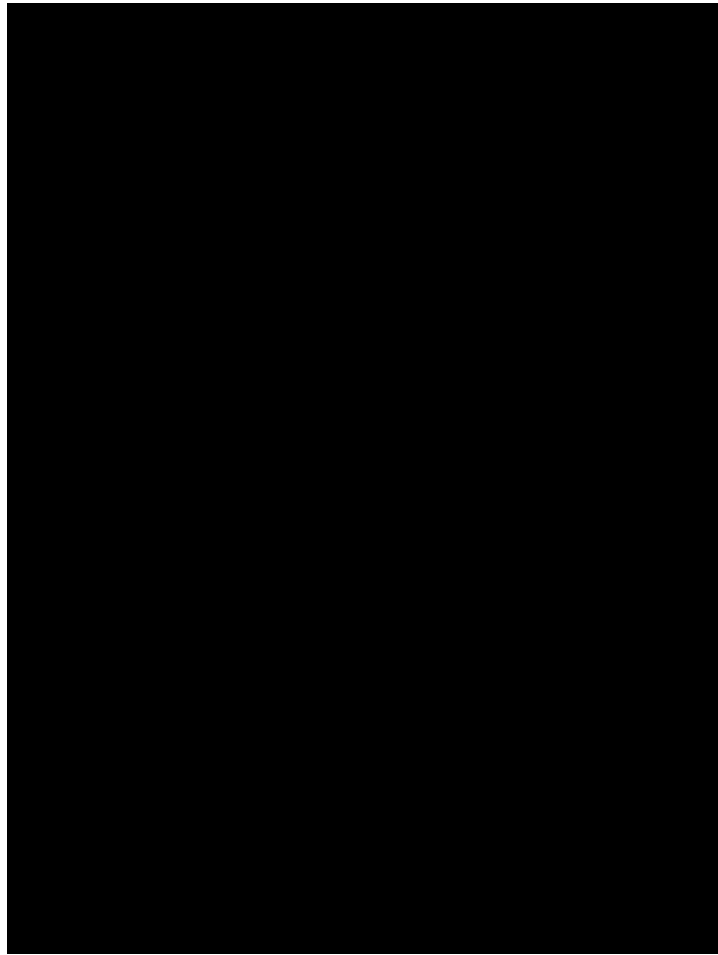


Figure 1-10: Studio is prepared for a wedding ceremony.

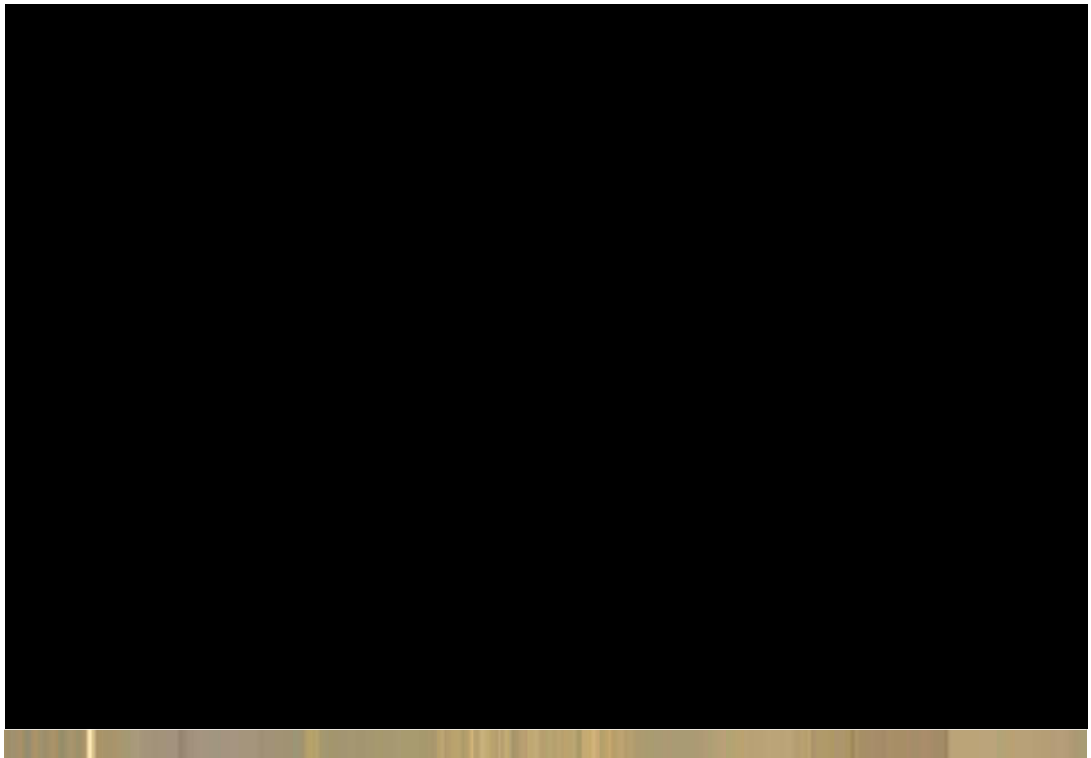


Figure 1-11: A wedding ceremony on stage.

As this brief description shows, the marriage show is specifically designed for those who are *serious* about getting married (as staff and participants both emphasise), and televising the matchmaking process for the public gaze. The show itself, which is aired live three hours a day, five times a week, is shaped and re-shaped in *the intense present* of the production process, with the participation of hundreds of candidates/suitors, studio audience members and staff, as well as with the audiences who watch the show from various other settings and participate by phone. The live(li)ness of the production process becomes apparent in Erkan's (the call centre coordinator) account of his working environment. He points to the variety of calls they receive in addition to those coming from applicants, i.e. calls from those who just want to chat with whichever staff member picks up the phone, calls from those who enthusiastically request to say hello to Esra Erol, and those who wish to solicit charity during the live broadcast. Erkan seems proud that callers seem to appreciate the show enough that they would call just to talk to someone there about their everyday miseries. He also described how impressed he was with the calls for assistance they received from earthquake victims immediately after the Van Earthquake:² *'Some were even calling while the shaking was still going on'. 'We diverted their calls to Kızılay,'*³ he noted. Indeed the example of the earthquake is indicative of the centrality of the show in many of its viewers' lives, and its connective role between nodes of society, including person to person contact and even contact between the public and the state.

As popular as the program has been, its format has been controversial in Turkey. As a reality show format within which participants are encouraged to share their past

² Van, an Eastern Anatolian city of Turkey, was struck by a destructive earthquake in October 2011, which killed 644 people and injured 1,966, according to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD). I was in the studio the day after the Earthquake. The studio was full of sadness and grief, which was reflected in the music and the host's emotional speeches. Erkan's example also demonstrates how the atmosphere of the show moved audiences towards the show, making it a mediator of state action in relief efforts.

³ Red Crescent. The Turkish state's charity organisation, part of the International Red Cross-Red Crescent Initiative.

experiences as well as their future expectations regarding marriage, the show tends to be judged as unrealistic and voyeuristic. Since I began this research project I have often been exposed to variants of the question: *'is it [the show] for real?'* from friends, family members, students, and people on social media, usually in a sarcastic and degrading tone that implies the show, its participants, and their life stories are perceived as being freaky and trashy. I have always tried to respond to this question diplomatically, reserving my emotional response for the task of thinking through my engagement with the research. I would simply answer, *'Yes, everything is very authentic and real; you sense it from the moment you enter the studio'*. Despite our different levels of engagement with the show, I think my feelings were quite like those of Esra Erol, the host and brand name of the show, when she was posed the question *'Do those marriages taking place in your show endure?'* on a local news program. I quite empathised with her when I heard the half-controlled, half-exposed anger in her voice as she replied, *'Why not? They endure just like your marriage endures!'* I'd wished I could answer those questions in a similar manner, *'Those people are real as you are!'*

Now, as I step into the task of describing the marriage show format more specifically, it is necessary to take one step back from my encounters with the question of reality and elaborate instead on several possible meanings of it, and to further contextualise it within a discussion of the marriage show. The question, *'is it for real?'* may have several meanings: It may be about whether the show is real or scripted, whether the participants are ordinary people or amateur actors/actresses who are paid to pretend to be living out the miseries, or who pretend to be proper marriage candidates and come to the show in order to deceive other candidates and the audiences. All these possible meanings/readings of the question merge into the register of scrutinising participants and their performances according to a normative scheme which registers what counts as reality.

The notion of *reality* as used in this study can be better understood with reference to White's argument on the relationship between reality and narrativity:

The very distinction between real and the imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which "the true" is identified with "the real" only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity (1981: 6).

According to White, historical truths are produced as the real as soon as they are narrativised. Therefore the truth of the nation is produced as the real, as soon as it is normatively framed in certain forms. This is what I would like to maintain regarding audiences' expectations of 'the real' from television. I suggest that whenever a television show exceeds the limits of their 'sense' of reality as constructed within certain normative limits, and according to a regime of truth at a larger scale, audiences begin to question its reality. This is the case for almost all television genres – be it television news, melodramas, sitcoms or reality shows – at least for the audiences of the Turkish broadcasting industry, an industry I worked within for this study, as well as for previous studies on television serials (Akınerdem 2005, 2012). Audiences remain on the alert, suspicious of being deceived by what they see on television.

Therefore, I build my analysis of the marriage show on the notion of *normativities*: **what kinds of norms are deployed and/or challenged in the marriage show that it generates such scrutiny over its relationship to *realness*?** To unpack this question, I look at three aspects of the marriage show and investigate them as normative orders that are deployed, juxtaposed, and negotiated in the process of formulating a distinctive, charming, popular television show.

First, I explore it as a reality show format which is articulated to the global flow of media images, narratives and genres. I argue that the scrutiny of the marriage show format has generic implications relating to the reality show genre wherever it is produced or

consumed, both due to doubts over its relationship to reality and for pandering to the voyeuristic impulses of audiences by bringing the private lives of ‘normal people’ into the public sphere (Hill, 2005; Grindstaff, 2002; Skeggs and Wood, 2012). I explore the generic qualities of the marriage show throughout the dissertation from this vantage point.

The second theme of my research is about how the reality show genre is adapted to the Turkish context. To clarify this, I trace the marriage show within the history of television broadcasting in Turkey (Chapter 2). The show came into existence as a reality show format, one among several new genres that began to re-shape the televisual terrain after the state monopoly gave way to commercial broadcasting in 1991. During the 1990s and early 2000s, talent shows, game shows, reality shows, melodramas, talk shows and women’s programming began to infiltrate the daytime rhythms of the Turkish-speaking world. As the media industry in Turkey became articulated to the global flow of media images, narratives and genres, audiences who had previously only seen the lives of those deemed appropriate within the hegemonic representational scheme of the state began to witness the release of television’s frames, prompting concerns as to the relationship between television and reality. My argument is that television audiences question the realness of what they see whenever it exceeds an acceptable framing of the national subjectivity within the mediascape. Scrutiny of the marriage show resides in this gap between the subjects, narratives and images associated with Turkey’s nation-making project, which excluded the bulk of the masses from the representative framework, and the new subjects, narratives and images that have complicated the state project of representation. How do these new forms, which opened the television frame to the formerly excluded masses, re-draw the boundaries of reality and thus propriety normatively? This became the main problem to be resolved by the television industry as it generated programming to suit the ever evolving tastes of audiences. The televisual terrain, I argue, was becoming open to forms that mediate intimacies: namely self-

narrations, and emotional revelations of subjects in the process of being *upgraded* from the *dangerous masses* to *ambiguous persons*, as I put it in Chapter 2. Their presence and these mediated intimacies have been dialogically judged and assessed normatively as these new genres and formats evolved.

The marriage show is one of the new formats bringing *ambiguous persons* to the fore. Many of the new formats are based on talent, chance, or physical endurance; the marriage show is focused on improving the lives of subjects through marriage. Thus, while pursuing the normativities at play in the making of the marriage show, the main emphasis should be on its *marriage* aspect. The show is distinctive for orienting participants towards marriage as an aspiration, and for giving audiences the opportunity to judge participants with reference to this aspiration. From this vantage point, weddings and marriage are both the most alluring aspect of the show and the most targeted when the show's authenticity is called into question. '*Is this real?*' is usually followed up with additional questions like '*how can anyone decide to get married on TV?*', or '*how can one talk about the most private aspects of their lives or their family secrets on stage?*'. Thus, the glare of the marriage show resides in its venture to open marriage and matchmaking to the public gaze and to public judgement.

Yet, I also suggest that it is because the format is based on marriage that the show is registered and appreciated as a *serious* format, compared to other entertainment/reality show formats. Desire is framed *into* the norms of the marriage, while narratives of the self are also confined to a certain level of propriety, i.e. the concern with being registered as proper marriage candidates. Thus, while the marriage show is an outcome of the widening of televisual frames to formerly excluded subjects, narratives and images in Turkey, it also mediates intimacy within safe limits by deploying the norm of marriage. That is, the question of how to re-draw the boundaries of reality from among the endless flow of subjects and narratives that complicate the state-driven definition of propriety is

answered through the show's commitment to *marriage*. It is also crucial to underline that marriage itself is not a single norm. Rather, marriage and matchmaking contain their own sets of norms and conventions which complement and/or contradict each other. How is it going to be initiated? Who (else) will be involved in the process of matchmaking? What kind of a marriage contract will prevail? Where will the couple live? There are no straightforward answers to these questions in a given context, especially in the context within which this study took place. I therefore pursue throughout this dissertation how the show is shaped by various norms pertaining to marriage, along with other normativities that are invested into the format in order to shed light at least partially on contemporary marriage practices in Turkey and their relationship to vision/visibility/television.

The third theme of my analysis is the candidates' investments in the show as self-narrators. While examining marriage as one of the normative frames of the show, I also investigate how desirous parties move and are moved into the human circuit of television and the human circuit of marriage. I suggest that the show uses marriage norms to attract audiences not only to the glamour of the television stage, but also to the pursuit of lifelong happiness through matrimonial union. My analysis of female candidates' movements into the flow of the show is focused on the types of life stories they share.

To look at how these different normativities intermingle, as well as how they are exceeded/released/questioned in the crafting of the marriage show and its subjects, I use the notion of the *frame* as an analytical tool. Production of the show in particular and the format in general is a dynamic process of shaping and re-shaping content through normative negotiations with participants regarding who is fit to appear on screen in pursuit of marriage (Chapter 6). I borrow the term from Judith Butler's (2009) study on war photography. According to Butler, in the context of war, the frames around the image draw the contours of *life* itself: the framing of injury and death implicates appraisals of

whose lives are worthy of representation, and consequently, whose lives are grievable by a global audience. She argues that taking a photograph is itself a normative act that ‘contributes to the scene’ (2009: 84) by selecting and framing what is deemed representable and worth circulating worldwide to arouse a response against the human suffering linked to war. In my analysis, I extend the notion of frame from visual frames to all kinds of activities that constitute the proper marriage candidates and proper participants of the marriage show. The frames of the marriage show are normative schemes that register the candidates as proper subjects of marriage and representable subjects of marriage show simultaneously. Thus, I use frame to refer to all kinds of (physical, normative, emotional) boundaries that candidates (and suitors) cross in order to be deemed representable subjects on the show, which simultaneously lends them credibility as candidates for marriage and lends the show credibility as an acceptable pathway to marriage. The frame of the television screen is the ultimate frame, on which the live show plays out as candidates and suitors finally meet.

Another aspect of frame that I would like to draw attention to is that, according to Butler, frames ‘must circulate in order to establish their hegemony’ (2009: 12), and to *differentially* recognise what counts as life. Accordingly, I suggest that the circulation of the reality show genre and its format, and their adaptation into different contexts, are themselves framing practices. Genre and format reiterate and (in some cases) adjust or complicate various norms where they arrive and take up residence. There is a certain *direction* of circulation in television broadcasting in Turkey (see Chapter 2): forms, formats and genres come from global media industries which are still dominated by US and European media centres, although there are newer actors in the form of the South Asian and Middle Eastern media industries. The adaptation and hybridisation of formats and genres is a prevailing method of the industry in Turkey.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that this dissertation traces framing practices from the subjects' vantage point. If, as Skeggs and Woods put it, 'the boundaries of audience and performer are being eroded in television's landscape, and reality television is charged by intensified affect' (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 6), I can put my question this way: What kind of pathway enables the television audiences to come onto the marriage show as candidates/suitors? As a popular television show, the marriage show invites its audiences to watch, enjoy, and criticise, as well as to call in to apply to participate in the human flow of the show, and these can no longer be analysed as the separate activities of production and reception. I aim here to overcome this separation by focusing on the participation process of the candidates and the suitors from their first call into the show through the narration of their personal stories on stage, with the aim of understanding how the show's frames are maintained through normative negotiations between candidates and staff, as well as candidates and their families and significant others. At a larger scale, candidates end up on stage, within the intimate public of the show, wherein they become subject to judgements relating to their propriety/marriageability. At this last level, the frames of the show entail the norms of making proper subjects, who will ultimately be registered as *the reality* of the nation.

Within this framework, this study aims to approach the marriage show both as a popular daytime show and as a pathway to marriage. The main focus of the study is *the television participation as a process*, which begins in the various settings from which the viewing public watch and decide whether and how to actively participate in the show, and reaches its climax as audience members end up on stage as candidates and suitors. Indeed the show never ends for some – i.e. those who get married or those who have gained fame/publicity through their participation. While the study is limited to one season of the show between September 2011 and June 2012, and is spatially framed within the studio space, I aim to trace how participation becomes a life choice for candidates while being

part of the everyday routines of production staff. I argue that the encounters between these different subjects are sites of normative negotiation relating to *appearing* and *marrying* on television.

At a larger framework, the show is part of the flow of daytime television broadcasting in Turkey that, as an entertainment format, sets the everyday rhythms of life and provides content for debates/judgements on – as well as being an increasingly popular route to – marriage. It is at this level of everyday rhythm and normative judgements that I trace the tropes for making and re-making of the nation through new television formats. In the following sections, I will first outline genre and format as the main analytical framework for this study. Second, I will focus on the marriage aspect of the show more closely. In both sections, my aim is to re-think the nation as a relevant tool of analysis for conceiving the norms, sensibilities and expectations pertaining to marriage as formulated and staged in a reality show format.

1.1 Genre and Format

I use genre and format both as analytical tools and objects of analysis throughout the dissertation. As analytical tools, I use them to define and describe the marriage show as an outcome of industrial and audience practices. As objects of analysis, I pursue how the frames of the marriage show become endowed with norms and conventions by its producers with reference to the format of the show. That is to say, while defining and describing the marriage show as a format under the rubric of the reality show genre, I pay attention to staff's and candidates' references to the conventions of the show as characteristics or 'necessities of the format', as they put it, throughout my analysis.

Both used as taxonomic terms, genre and format come from different analytical and historical backgrounds, and also shape television production and consumption differently. A variety of cultural forms – drama, cinema, music, and literature – have contributed to the formulation of television genre categories. Nevertheless, Mittel argues

that television as a contemporary venue for multi-generic popular cultural production complicates the conventions of genre theory, due to ‘the specific industry and audience practices unique to television (such as scheduling decisions, commonplace serialization, habitual viewing, and channel segmentation)’ that intervene in the formulation, re-formulation and demise of genres (2004: 1). Mittel suggests a discursive methodology to trace the *use* and *circulation* of a particular genre category among multiple subjects – producers, viewers, participants, researchers, critics – and through multiple practices. Thus, a generic analysis goes beyond the text and normative judgment about that text, and pays attention to the discursive formation that shapes/is shaped by industry and audience practices (Mittel 2004).

Format, a newer term, is defined as ‘a production category with relatively rigid boundaries that are difficult to transgress without coming up with a new format’ (Turner, 2009: 9). As such, format is a newer concept which has particularly shaped television production since the 1990s. As Skeggs and Wood quote from Keane and Morgan (2008), ‘the television format industry is a calculated response to globalization and to the contemporary television environment of increased interactivity and audience involvement in program production’ (2012: 85). Increased interactivity and audience involvement lead to a heavy flow into the television frame from the audience so new formats are produced to meet/control the flow while extracting value from it (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). As such, format is a basic tool with which television supplies new products to a global media industry targeting a variety of audiences who are willing to watch and participate in new formats as genres travel globally. Format points to a generic quality of reality television: its ability ‘to cannibalise itself in order to survive in a commercially uncertain media environment’ (Hill, 2005: 39). Within this framework, I can conclude that format is an innovative formula of post-1990s television which is based on a constant replacement of

the older with the newer, across different contexts, targeting audience reaction and response under the rubric of the reality show genre.

It is crucial to underline that genres and formats are not *structures* but *structuring* elements. They are always in the making; that is, rather than conforming to pre-established limits, genres and formats determine the indeterminate, and frame the chaotic into a flow and into subjects who move within that flow, while the indeterminate continually opens up new possibilities. As Derrida points out, 'Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging' (1981: 61). While the text always exceeds the limits of generic conventions, the genre calls it back to its terms, to *the law*, in Derrida's terms. Thus, tracing generic conventions and format qualities is a job that seeks to identify the law at the moment of its undoing.

The *submission to* and *subversion of* the law of genre in the case of reality television becomes a complicated object of study, as it is a genre based on constantly generating excitement by staging unpredictable occurrences. In other words, the reality show genre's premise is the constant undoing of the law, not only by formulating new formats, but also through its conventions of unpredictability and use of non-professional actors. As Skeggs and Wood put it, 'the unpredictability of non-professional actors offers potential interest beyond the formula that we all know and recognize' (2012: 27). The reality show contains potentialities for producing a formula called *format* while also entailing the unpredictability of what will happen next, which can and does exceed the formula, and as such, more dynamically elicits audience response than do (scripted) genres like soap operas or documentaries. This is the case for the marriage show as well: every time the backstage doors open and new participants (candidates and suitors) are welcomed to the stage to meet on camera, the pleasure of *not* knowing what will happen next is generated, along with new possibilities for judgement and assessment, as is the convention of the

format. Therefore, from a genre perspective, this is a study of the marriage show as a television format whose generic convention is an unpredictability that is enabled and enhanced through the participation of non-professional actors. Accordingly, the regeneration of excitement provokes scrutiny from the audience as expressed by the question: '*is it for real?*'. This is how the form itself becomes one of the bases for complicating the normative frames of what counts as real.

A second generic convention of the reality show is that it puts *the self* into play in a particular way. Various studies on reality television connect its success to the rise of neo-liberalism as a new social imaginary which presupposes the preeminence of self-reflexivity and self-responsibility as a means of survival in response to the state's gradual withdrawal of its support for individuals as citizens (Skeggs and Wood 2012; Ouellette and Hay 2008). Before moving on to explore how the marriage show puts the self into play, or whether it enables this kind of self, it is vital to ask the following question: **Can we understand the rise of the marriage show format as an outcome of the state's withdrawal from supporting individuals as citizens in the case of Turkey?** To address this, it is necessary to understand the centrality of the family within the welfare regime in Turkey. Özar and Yakut-Çakar underline how the welfare regime in Turkey, far from supporting individuals as citizens, has been confined to 'the social security system and patchy social assistance schemes' (2013: 25), which allot most welfare services to the family, and specifically to women within the family. Building their argument on statistics that reveal the low rates of the women's employment in Turkey, they emphasise that women are eligible to receive welfare services only when they are part of a family unit, and therefore the dependant of a man. The family has always been the main mediator between the state and the individual, in return for enabling the state to control and regulate its subjects at all levels.

My argument is that, rather than *withdrawing* from such responsibilities, the welfare regime in Turkey is imbued with technologies and forms that enable the *control* and *regulation* of its subjects at new and more subtle levels: new information technologies that register and control women's reproductive health (pregnancy follow-up systems; encouraging normal delivery instead of caesarean, etc.); policies that aim to increase the birth rate; a considerable amount of welfare fund for infants, and for children's education, which is distributed to women (mothers) within the family; financial support to widows (Özar and Yakut-Cakar 2013). In this way, women become part of the welfare system not as individuals, but as service providers within the value circuit of social welfare, within which the family is the ultimate lifestyle structure, as well as being the only addressee for welfare support.

The marriage show's dedication to marriage can be understood from this vantage point: it puts the self into play for individual success and fulfilment (only) through marriage as the one and only desire and expectation for having a 'proper' life. Therefore, the central characteristic of the format is that people come on and narrate their life stories like in all other reality show formats, but with the specific aim/aspiration of getting married. Thus, it is necessary to focus on marriage as the value regime of the show. I will go into detail about the marriage aspect of the show in later in this chapter. What I would like to emphasise here is that the new and subtle forms of subject control and regulation by the state are accompanied by the reality show genre's emphasis on the self as a site of improvement. I would like to highlight Skeggs and Wood's (2012) focus on the class-based implications of self-expression on the reality show to clarify my argument. They point out that the reality show 'makes areas of life that were previously invisible visible and subject to public judgement' (2012: 6). My argument is that participants in the marriage show perform their deficits as per the norms and conventions of matchmaking, and exhibit their capacities to accrue value through self-transformation, according to these

norms and conventions. Thus, it is necessary to look at *the institution of marriage* as the value regime at play in the marriage show.

The value circuit at play in the marriage show is the assessment of its participants according to their moral and emotional worthiness within norms and conventions of marriage and matchmaking in the Turkish context. Then how do the norms and conventions of marriage merge with the conventions of the reality show genre so that the marriage show emerges as a distinctive, attractive, popular television show that is able to maintain the acceptable boundaries of self-narration? How do subjects come to terms with these boundaries as they move through the participation process? How can we locate the marriage show between the spectacular unpredictability of the reality show genre and the pre-established code/norms/conventions of marriage? These are the questions that I seek to answer while defining the show as a format dedicated to marrying people under the rubric of the reality show genre. Specifically, I analyse what kind of value regimes are at play in Chapter 6, in my exploration of the normative frames of the show.

Later on, in Chapter 7, I look at how the show differentiates candidates from each other within a spectrum between *propriety* and what will be called here the *money shot*. I borrow the term from Grindstaff (2002), who points to the ‘explicit revelation in which people “get down and dirty” and “bare it all” for the pleasure, fascination, or repulsion of viewers’ (2002: 20). Remembering that the marriage show is produced in order *not* to allow participants to ‘bare it all’ – especially for the repulsion of viewers – the money shot in the context of the marriage show refers to moments when an excessively tragic story of failure or suffering *leaks* onto the stage. While the staff assert that they choose candidates and frame their self-narratives carefully, the marriage show stage is open to participants from a wide variety of backgrounds, and their life stories do sometimes exceed the acceptable boundaries demarcating who is and is not marriageable/representable, as interpreted by the staff. I would like to reiterate my

argument that the reality show genre, by definition, widens the representational frame of television, allowing the formerly excluded *masses* and their lives onto the screen. I observe that these candidates and their narratives, which subvert the normative discourses of propriety on the show, often gain popularity even among those who do not watch the show, as stories about them become widely circulated. For example, one can find hundreds of clips on YouTube with striking titles like ‘*How did this female candidate’s criteria shock audiences?*’, ‘*Esra Erol threw this candidate out of the studio!*’, ‘*Pregnant woman attends the show as a marriage candidate!*’, ‘*Turkey hasn’t seen a groom-to-be like this before!*’ and so on. Some of these videos have been viewed tens of thousands of times, and in some cases have even been reported on in the news. Thus, as I argue above, the marriage show definitely blurs the line between everyday realities and that which is represented on screen. Paradoxically, however, as these iterations of everyday reality transgress the television frame, they are simultaneously judged as trashy, fictitious and unrealistic by audiences. While trying to avoid pejorative criticism, the production team is also concerned with producing an interesting, charming, and popular TV show which attracts audiences and keeps the show on the air. Thus, the marriage show format is a product of tension between *the frames* and *the leakages* that transgress these frames. With the term leakage, I refer to narratives and subjects that complicate the frames of the show and expose the formerly unseen to the public gaze, and to judgement. By pursuing these narratives as told on the stage, I track propriety as constituted within the ongoing tension between frames and leakages in Chapter 7.

Besides these analytical pathways through which I define the marriage show as a reality show format, I would like to emphasise that format and genre are objects of analysis through which I pursue how the frames of the show are endowed with norms pertaining to marriage. That is to say, just as production staff cite the *necessities* of the format, in my own analysis, I pursue how the staff *instrumentally* refer to format as a

normative scheme to endow the frames of the show with norms related to marriage, such as family involvement and equivalence (*denklik*) between candidates and suitors, or deal with tensions related to the issue of religious vs. civil marriage contracts; this analysis is the focus of Chapter 6. In a similar manner, in Chapters 4-5 I track how candidates refer to the qualities of the format and work to maintain the safe limits of self-narration in their own accounts of how they made the decision to come on the show. Finally, in Chapter 8, I investigate the production of *vision* and *sound* as two aspects of the show as broadcasted on television. I investigate how the show is produced in order to attract audiences through its visual and auditory pathways to participate in the show at various levels. They do so either by phoning in to share information about a candidate, or by becoming candidates in their own right, such that the orchestra will play for them as the backstage doors open and they step onto the stage as actors in their own (potential) love story.

1.2 The Family as an Expectation

It was eight months after I had begun my field visits to the marriage show studio that I conducted my first interview with Esra Erol, the host of the show. What struck me most during this first encounter was how devoted she seemed to be towards her job, and how enthusiastic a television matchmaker she was. When I asked her thoughts and feelings about hosting the marriage show, she replied, *‘This is a happy job’*, and continued, *‘There is an initial moment for all relationships in people’s lives. It is really delightful to put your mark on that particular moment’*. Yet, she also noted that it was not devoid of disappointments: *‘If it goes well, it is thanks to God; but if it goes badly, it is due to Esra’*, she half-jokingly said, and added: *‘If they end unhappy after starting a relationship with those very strong emotions, it leaves a wound and sorrow in my life as well’*.

I empathised with her, as a researcher who had at that point spent months behind the scenes at the marriage show and witnessed many on-air meetings, courtships,

engagement ceremonies and weddings. Perhaps my empathy was largely due to my emotional engagement with the candidates I had met in the studio. I remember how my eyes had almost filled with tears as I waited backstage with a female candidate I call Sezen for her engagement ceremony to begin. She was so in love with the groom-to-be, telling me how she had dreamed of this day, wearing an engagement dress and '*taking the first step towards the marriage of my dreams*'. Similarly, I sometimes feel quite weird when I remember how I would sometimes pray for a female suitor as she went on stage to meet a candidate – '*God, please let him like her!*' –, especially when the female suitor had expressed how much she liked him as she waited backstage.

I also empathised with Esra Erol's lament about relationships that end unhappily in a context where marriage is not only about finding a 'spouse one loves'. Marriage, as Tekçe puts it in her study on marriage arrangements in contemporary Istanbul, constitutes the 'centre of a nexus of rights and duties which bind people to each other, vital to the reproduction of the individual as a responsible, moral, social being, and of the communal worlds to which one belongs' (2004: 180). As I elaborate throughout the dissertation, it is not an exaggeration to say that being married is a prerequisite for being counted as having a proper life and a recognised place in society in the Turkish context. Özar and Yakut-Cakar's (2013) study on *women without men* shows how not being married or divorced, besides making individuals vulnerable to stigma, scrutiny and infantilisation, leaves them in a space of loneliness in a context where the family is the default source of livelihood. Similarly, in her study of familial citizenship in Turkey, Sirman clarifies how being unmarried is conceived as a threat: 'an unmarried person is much more likely to be suspected of a political or other felony than a person who is married and has children' (2005: 160). At a larger scale, the show's investment in the making of families is an essential part of the project of cultivating proper subjects of the nation in a context where citizenship is particularly formulated as 'familial citizenship', which hails women and

men to proper subject positions as ‘a sovereign husband and his dependent wife/mother’ rather than an individual’ (Sirman, 2005: 148). I would like to add my observation that in everyday conversations about the marriage show, people usually do not ask me why people want to get married; rather, they ask why they prefer to use the marriage show to get married. Therefore, it is understandable that the failure of a relationship for Esra Erol belongs to an anxiety at a larger scale, while her striving for success is part of an extended norm of being *successfully* married.

What, then, are the *secrets* of properly and desirously getting married and coming to terms with those subject positions within the family? Indeed marriage and matchmaking entail the difficult and delicate work of measuring not only feelings about a possible mate, but also normative assessments of the criteria for starting up a relationship with someone suitable/proper. As I show in my analysis of frames (Chapter 6), these kinds of measurements and negotiations are central to the marriage show format, where Esra Erol occupies a key role as the main negotiator and the matchmaker. When I ask what kind of families she dreams of putting together on this show, she answers:

On this show? What kind of families? Just like our mothers and fathers, who grow older on the same pillow, raising their children in peace. I dream of families with only one child who is raised perfectly, instead of 3-5 children. I dream of nuclear families.

Esra’s definition of the dream family, which is indeed a detailed description of the nuclear family in its ideal form, is worthy of analysing firstly in relation to the format. As she answers my question, she implicitly characterises the show as a route to marriage which complies with norms, conventions and expectations pertaining the family *as we know it*. Thus, she convinces me that the show’s promise is not far from the family as we – two women talking about marriage – are familiar with, and as dreamt and expected across generations. Therefore she repeats the claim that there is nothing *unrealistic* about

the show. As such, she draws me a roadmap to make a connection between the marriage show as a new route to marriage, and the nuclear family as the norm.

As understood through Esra's description, the nuclear family is an **institution of intimacy**, to borrow from Berlant, towards which people's desires are directed by the aspiration that 'the relations formed within those frames will turn out beautifully, lasting over the long duration, perhaps across generations' (1998: 281). I would like to underline that the nuclear family – here outlined as an ideal case by Esra Erol – should be understood through a discussion of the family in Turkey. As two women of around the same age (born in the early 1980s), both of whom were the eldest of three children in lower middle-class families, Esra Erol and I were raised with similar ideas about what constituted the ideal case nuclear family: a family devoted to *traditional* values and *modern* promise at once, i.e. a family structure that endures by virtue of its devotion to the values of those who came before, headed by parents who planned their family size according to their means – unlike our own mothers and fathers. This was encoded as a sign of modernity during the years we were growing up in Turkey. Therefore, the nuclear family in Turkey is an institution of intimacy which connects people to each other through an orientation towards the nation. Mating and matchmaking ideals make *the nation* perennially a future expectation, rather than a destination already reached. Esra Erol's anxiety about unhappy endings can be understood at a larger scale as an anxiety about failing to keep track of the nation as a future endowment.

Surely, her depiction of the ideal family unit is not so easy to achieve within the unpredictable flow of the show, which is nevertheless the convention of the reality show genre as I described it above. The process of matchmaking, both within and outside of the show, is not without ambivalences, contradictions and tensions which reside between potential success and failure, as Esra Erol puts forward. That is to say, endeavouring to contribute to the establishment of successful marriages is not an easy task where the

criteria for success are strict, yet the aspirations that motivate people to come onto the marriage show are widely varied. And as the multifarious masses emerged from the hegemonic representational scheme, heated public debates on various aspects of Turkey's marriage and family conventions ensued.

In this dissertation, I aim to trace the marriage show as a pathway to marriage, through which subjects take part in subtle normative negotiations on the making of happy families. I explore these in dialogue with a discussion about the contemporary meanings, practices and tensions over the making of the proper Turkish family, which is central to the making of the nation in Turkey at both the level of governing the social and of subjectifying the individual.

Thus, as a backdrop to a discussion of the relationship between televised matchmaking and marriage sensibilities and norms as articulated by its subjects (i.e. the candidates, the staff, the host, and the studio and television audiences), I would like to maintain how proper subjectivity in Turkey should be understood first and foremost as being oriented towards the family as an institution of intimacy and as the ultimate form of social organisation.

If one of the constitutive mechanisms of the nation has been the hegemonic representational scheme of the state, which excludes the everyday realities of many people, other institutions of the nation-state have also been constructed using similar exclusionary mechanisms, silencing certain aspects of life and relationships. The family, in this respect, can be defined as a regime of secrets, which is formulated and represented in the registers of the state – as well as in women's novels and magazines – as a model to be lived up to at the expense of keeping its actual structures of relation, domination and violence within the domain of the family (Sirman, 2002). It is crucial to underline here that the project of reifying the nuclear family as the normative family unit was directed not only at the institutional level but at the level of personal desire as well. This study is

thus an endeavour to explore the desires and expectations associated with the pursuit of marriage on the show. Here, I agree with Tekçe's point that 'although there is a considerable literature on family in Turkey, it is difficult to find studies ... which engage directly with the sentiments, perceptions, and practices that shape family life from the perspective of social actors, and which examine reproduction as a process of strategy and negotiation, thus as a dynamic element in concrete social relationships (2004: 176). I hope my study addresses this gap, as it focuses on the female candidates' own accounts of marriage and their encounters and negotiations throughout their participation in the show. My focus on female candidates (Chapters 4, 5 and 7) follows the argument that female subjectivity is constituted on the basis of keeping family secrets (in the case of criminal or socially unacceptable incidents like domestic violence, marriage without consent, marriage with close relatives, the prevalence of extended family over nuclear family intimacy, and so on). What is foremost to this kind subjectivity, as Sirman suggests, is keeping that subjectivity itself secret. Nevertheless, the show opens up a window to those secrets, first and foremost by enabling and encouraging the self as an aspect of subjectivity, as I put it earlier. **Therefore, candidates' desires and expectations about marriage, and their endeavour to achieve these expectations, become visible on stage. I aim to analyse these desires and expectations as part of a larger framework of desires and sensibilities pertaining to family in Turkey.**

As I maintain in Chapter 2, as television's frames expanded to include new themes, narratives and subjects, these formerly silenced aspects of family life also began to leak onto the television screen, complicating ideal-type representations of the family. The marriage show, as I have noted, has been criticised for being unrealistic, because it broadcasts non-ideal-type aspects of family life, up to and including the corrupt, the ugly and the violent – the secrets that lie behind the façade of the happy family. However, it is crucial to underline that the secrets of the family are not revealed in their totality on the

marriage show stage. I argue that the marriage show format is produced every day through normative negotiations over what to tell and what not to tell, who to show and who not to show, or whether a suitor is compatible with a candidate. Thus, as I put it above, the assessment of individuals' appearance, stories, values and expectations are parts of an endeavour to maintain the safe limits of self-narration, as well as to differentiate between proper and improper stories. In this way, I suggest, the marriage show dynamically reproduces propriety within the intimate public cultivated by the show.

In addition, I would like to underline here that if the frames of the show are drawn upon subtle negotiations on propriety, there are always excesses and leakages which find their way to the marriage show stage. This is partly because there are always multiple and contradictory norms of the family in Turkey which had been kept out of the hegemonic representational frame of state television. In addition to this, besides the televisual terrain, (other) areas of the social and political terrain also undergo transformation, or *restoration*, as the government itself likes to put it, under the Justice and Development Party (hereafter AK Parti) government. I already pointed out there are new sites opened within the new welfare regime above. In addition to these, the norms, values and crises relating to family are under close scrutiny and debate in Turkey. Marriage age, gender roles within the family, number of children, motherhood, domestic violence are high profile themes of public debate falling under the rubric of 'AK Parti family policy'. The public debate stems from state policies that deploy a conservative discourse emphasising women's traditional roles within the family as mothers, along with the flexible working schemes which aim to recruit especially women into part-time and temporary jobs. In her study of governmental reform programs in Turkey, Babül provides a comprehensive backdrop for understanding various aspects of recent government policies:

Although the family has long been the locus of government intervention for inculcating proper citizen-subjects, the current government's call on family in

many areas of social and political life portrays a governmental rationality that combines neoliberal, neoconservative, and biopolitical agendas (2015: 123).

Within this framework, the AK Parti government can be distinguished from its predecessors firstly for its support of population increase both at an ideological level (a specific form of conservatism merging Islamism, Ottomanism and nationalism) and at a policy-making level. The AK Parti's family agenda can be understood in juxtaposition to the anti-natalist policies which had been prevalent throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Özbay 2009), along with a modernist discursive formation that encourages, as Esra Erol puts it, '*families with only one child who is raised perfectly*'. I think it is pertinent to say that the modernist discursive formation was accompanied by a racist state policy against Kurds during this period. The anti-natalist policies were part of the state's agenda against the Kurdish population in Turkey throughout the 1990s (along with other annihilating policies such as forced migration, the burning of Kurdish villages, and sexual violence against Kurdish women by Turkish state officials). As such, population policies in Turkey especially during the 1990s can be conceived as part of an ongoing war.

What, then, makes the AK Parti government different from its predecessors is that it foregrounds population ageing as one of the main issues of Turkey, this time along with a conservative discursive formation that emphasises women's traditional roles within the family. Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the prime minister from the time the AK Parti came to power in 2002 until he was elected president in 2014, asserts the pro-natalist policies of the state in the most manifest way, taking every opportunity to promote the idea of women marrying younger and having at least three children. The following quote is a good example, taken from his speech at a gathering of TÜRGEV (The Foundation for Services and Education for Youth), a government-backed foundation:

*Don't delay your marriage. Decide quickly and marry while you are studying or immediately after graduation — the minute you find your destiny [kısmet]. Don't be too selective. If you are, you won't achieve it.*⁴

The change is not only at the discursive level. Babül outlines the policies and future plans that shape recent state intervention in the family and women's role within it as follows:

... tighter regulation of alcohol sales; more conservative reproductive policies attempting to limit abortion, reduce caesarean sections, and encourage women to have at least three children; and attempts to limit mixed-gender living arrangements for college students and the creation of a "motherhood university" in Ankara (2015: 124).

It is obvious that none of these agenda items is without controversy, although the AK Parti is supported by the majority. I observe that all of these issues have shaped public debate and given rise to oppositional movements at least since 2011 (when I came back to Turkey for fieldwork). Today, the feminist movement in Turkey strongly opposes the new welfare program of the state, known as the 'Family and Employment Support Package'. The program was announced by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu with the following statement: *'Turkey's population is rapidly ageing. In order to protect the family and the dynamism of our population, we have to support women and family life'*.⁵ In the most general terms, the program aims to support women after giving birth with cash transfers in changing amounts, and with part-time work for full-time salary in changing durations depending on the number of children they have, as well as other benefits during maternity leave. Therefore, the government decidedly supports population increase, which is a major change from the government policies of the 1980s and early 1990s, yet

⁴ Doğan, Zülfikar, 2015. 'Turkey offers cash rewards for marrying early'. *Al-Monitor*, Feb 9, 2015 [online]. Available from: <http://www.al-monitor.com/> [accessed February 23, 2015].

⁵ 'Davutoğlu announces incentive package for mothers'. *Today's Zaman*, January 8, 2015 [online]. Available from: http://www.todayszaman.com/national/davutoglu-announces-incentive-package-for-mothers_369217.html [accessed February 18, 2015].

which is quite similar to, as Babül suggests, the policies of early republican Turkey, where the duty assigned to women was ‘nurturing robust children to fuel national development’ (2015: 124). What is different after nearly a century of the republic, however, is that in addition to giving birth to the next generation while also taking their place in the work force and taking care of other family members at home, ‘women in contemporary Turkey are called to family to serve as the engines of [this time] *neo-liberal* progress (2015: 124, emphasis added).

Finally, it is necessary to look at how the neo-liberal, nationalist and conservative agenda of the state differs from earlier annihilating policies towards Kurdish populations. I acknowledge Babül’s citing of the ongoing peace process between the Kurdish independence movement and the Turkish state, which is also part and parcel to re-constructing the nation through the family ‘as a metaphor for national unity’ (2015: 124). Babül points to a collective wedding ceremony (of 400 couples) which took place in 2013 in Diyarbakır, organised by the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs. The ceremony was marked as a milestone of the peace process, taking place with the participation of Masoud Barzani, the leader of Iraqi Kurdistan, and then-Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan. As Babül remarks, ‘Decorating the stage that Erdoğan and Barzani shared was a banner that read “*Çünkü biz büyük bir aileyiz*” (Because we are one big family)’ (Babül 2015, 124).

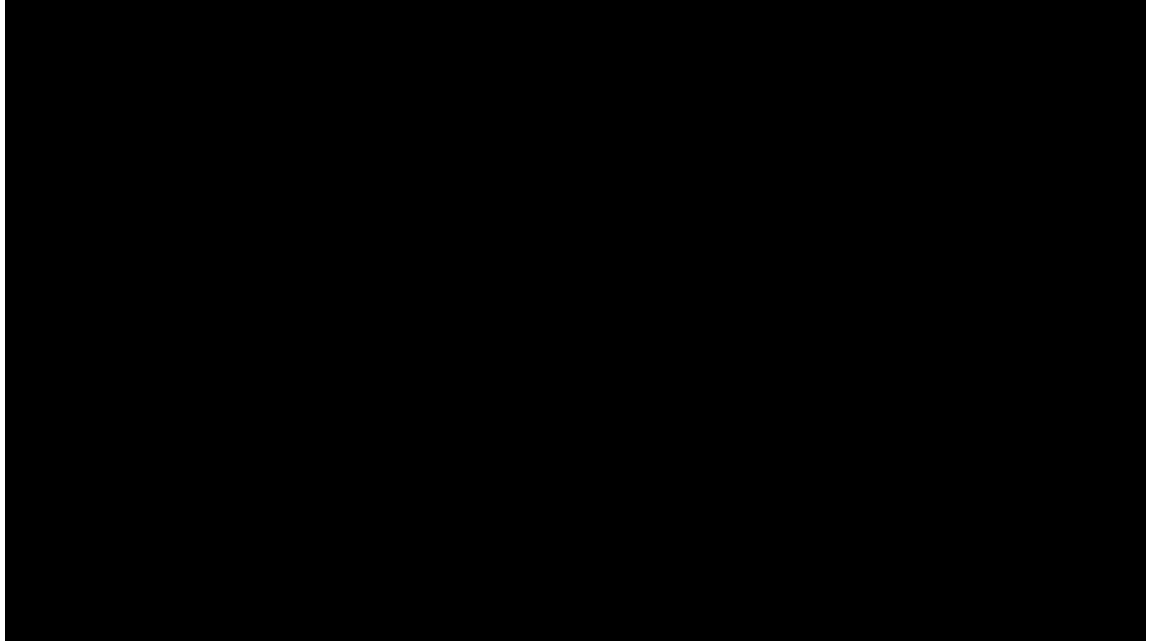


Figure 1-12: *Erdoğan and Barzani at the collective wedding ceremony of 400 couples.*⁶

Therefore, the family agenda of the government should also be read in parallel to processes akin to the Turkish-Kurdish war that has lasted for more than 30 years, and which is one of the main tensions that has shaped the state's endeavour to make and re-make the nation by triggering nationalist sensibilities. I remember the day we were watching this wedding ceremony in 2013, when I was in the middle of writing up the thesis. As a feminist and a member of the Women's Initiative for Peace in Turkey, I was feeling quite puzzled by the picture of peace and happiness that was being framed and streamed to Kurdish- and Turkish-speaking audiences live on TV and on the Web. Can marriage be the solution to 30 years of conflict and all the rage, suffering and resistance generated by it? As in the case of the marriage show, the Turkish state, in alliance with the Iraqi Kurdistan government, once more prescribed marriage as the solution to its most prominent conflict at the same time the show was trying to attract subjects to marriage as

⁶ 'Erdoğan ve Barzani'den çiftlere jest' *Milliyet*, November 17, 2013 [online]. Available from: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/> [accessed February 24, 2015].

a cure for their loneliness, as a way to feel safe, and as a path to happiness (assuming past miseries) in the future.

Although I do not go into detail about the contemporary state agenda regarding family and the corresponding tensions shaping the political terrain, I hope this study can be taken as a starting point for investigating the new arrangement of (some old, some new) values, practices, norms and crises pertaining to family in Turkey. It is within this context that investments of the self into the family, into marriage, and into the state become contested terrain, as well as being a glamorous way to serve the tastes of television viewers.

Finally, I would like to underline that what strikes me most about the show is that, despite all the efforts to delicately draw frames to construct and re-construct the family as the ultimate desire and expectation for ‘proper’ living, every time the backstage doors are opened to new participants and their stories about past failures and miseries, the show’s promise of happiness becomes obscured. It continues upon a fragile agreement with its subjects (the producers, the participants and the audiences); that is, ignorance of the fact that the family in its existing structures and promises is the *source* of, rather than solution to the problems, failures and sufferings shared on stage. This is part and parcel to the feeling of insecurity that begins with one’s self and extends to the familial, national, regional and global levels with regards to the flows of neo-liberalism, the fragility of the peace process, and the ongoing tensions and wars in the Middle East region that shake the foundations of people’s lives in Turkey. This study is an endeavour to have a closer look at the lives of subjects as they try to cope with this feeling of insecurity, and to build secure lives for themselves, taking the family as an expectation, and marriage as a route, particularly on a television show.

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

I have organised the dissertation into three parts corresponding to the three main areas of focus on the marriage show: locating it within a space and trajectory of television in Turkey; locating it within life cycle and self-narrative trajectories; and finally, articulating the frames of the show and locating life stories and accounts of the self within them.

In Chapter 2, I begin by contextualising the marriage show within the history of television; this constitutes the analytical backdrop of the format, and in relation to it, the emergence of the self as a site of narration and improvement in the (wider) cultural history of Turkey. I maintain how the frame of marriage draws the safe limits of self-narration for the marriage show format relative to other formats and genres shaping the televisual terrain in Turkey, especially since its commercialisation in 1991.

In Chapter 3, I move on to defining the contours of the *field*, and to the research pathways and tools I used throughout my research. While tentatively defining the field of research as the marriage show studio, I have also tried to emphasise how location matters when investigating television production and audience participation. Besides this, I tried to depict how my own dilemmas, concerns and priorities shaped the knowledge produced about my object of analysis. Indeed, one of the main dilemmas I have faced throughout this study has stemmed from difficulties related to researching a TV show which is widely debated in public. Therefore, I have tried to emphasise my reflexivity while wandering around the studio building not only as a researcher but also as a curious viewer, which lends originality to a study of a phenomenon that is already widely known and discussed throughout Turkey. Besides this, following the *homosocial* pathways that reconstruct the conventions of matchmaking, I imbued a particular focus on gender within this study. Thus, both as a researcher and as a viewer, I became my own informant as I developed

my analysis of how female candidates' bodies, narratives and movements are shaped by their participation in the show.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters 4-5) dwells on female candidates' reflections on their decisions to come on the show: how do they define and describe the show, and how do they locate it within their life trajectories and within their social, familial and communal memberships? How do they talk about themselves and their lives relative to their significant others on the show, whose confessional style has been enabled by the format? What are the forms, anchorages and affects that shape these narratives of the self? What do these accounts tell us about these new conventions of narrating the self, as well as new conventions of marriage? These are the questions that I seek to answer in Chapters 4 and 5.

In Chapter 4, my particular focus is on the register of trust that female candidates engage when referring to the show, to the host, and finally to themselves. Indeed, trust is a keyword both for participants and production staff, and it is asserted as the basis for applying to the show/selecting an applicant to be a candidate or suitor. In this chapter, I argue that it is because the format is based on marriage that the safe limits to self-narration are so delicately drawn. The show elicits trust through the judicious revelation and concealment of aspects of participants' private lives. Yet I would like to point out that trust is not inherent to the format or encounters around it; rather, it exists in a loop, where viewers register the show as secure and safe because its participants are trustworthy – because candidates register *themselves* as trustworthy and respectable subjects. It is through these registers of trust and respectability that the show is distinguished from its counterparts (other marriage shows and other reality show formats).

If trust is about maintaining safe limits to subjects' movement towards the marriage show/marriage, and simultaneously about the making of them as marriageable subjects, there must also be another register which points to those aspects of subjectivity that can

only be fulfilled through marriage. That is, if they are trustworthy, honourable, respectable, marriageable subjects, what is lacking in their subjectivity that they are looking for a marriage partner to fulfil them? I answer this question in Chapter 5 by focusing on another register that prevails in women's narratives of their decisions, this time pointing to their assessments of their selves, their pasts, and the current state of their lives on the basis of *loneliness*, as a register that points to a *lack*. My argument in this chapter is that loneliness is a register that imbues the subject with a sense of *self*, while also enabling her to talk about her *self* within a limited (i.e. safe) way in pursuit of a marriage which will cure her loneliness.

Thus, in the second part, I grapple with the space and forms that the show opens up for women to reflect on, assess, and narrate themselves within specific registers pertaining to marriage. While the reality show genre enables self-narrations, the wider norms and conventions of marriage limit these narratives.

In the third part (Chapters 6-8) I continue tracking candidates' movements into and within the human flow of the show and the human circuit of marriage. In Chapter 6, I change my focus from candidates' narratives to staff's accounts of the work of selecting and preparing candidates for the show. At this level, I deploy Butler's (2009) concept of *frame* to understand how the production and participation processes are endowed with the various norms I observed above so that candidates may be registered as proper marriage candidates, and the show as a proper pathway to marriage. In Chapter 7, I further investigate how the frames of propriety are maintained, questioned and subverted as life stories find their way on stage. I focus in particular on two female candidates' performances on stage, asking what kind of affective economy is at play in the show that their self-narratives can be differentiated from one another while conforming to the limits of *propriety*. Finally, in Chapter 8, I look at the ultimate frame of the show: the text that is finally produced. This includes how the sights and sounds of the show are compiled

within the frame of the camera and streamed to viewing environments with the aim of moving audiences towards the show as engaged and excited viewers, as well as commentators who provide supplemental information about candidates/suitors, or who may even decide to apply to become candidates/suitors themselves.

Before moving on to my analysis of the marriage show, I would like to reiterate that it is produced jointly by hundreds of people (staff, candidates, and studio audiences) and is on the air every weekday. The possible accounts of the show multiply as I wander into the studio building, walk around the stage, and observe what is going on from various vantage points. During my fieldwork, whenever I took a note or a photograph, or recorded a video in the studio, I felt as if I were stealing part of an uninteruptible flow, and that I risked missing out on this flow in my effort to freeze particular moments. As Grindstaff, who spent considerable time backstage at several talk shows, puts it, ‘just as producers may spend considerable time with guests but put only a tiny portion of their story onstage, ethnography by necessity selects and excludes’ (2002: 40). Similarly, here I extract excerpts from an endless flow of people, narratives, images and sounds and present them to the best of my understanding throughout the research.

CHAPTER 2: Tracking the Marriage Show in Turkish Television History

In this chapter, I will locate the marriage show within the narrative of broadcast television in Turkey. As a format based on the participants' venture to wed someone on television, it is no surprise that viewers are charmed by marriage shows. Yet the shows, as well as those who follow them or even glance at them in passing, are also often subject to critical or derisive comments. I would very often hear questions like '*Is it for real?*' from people who heard I was conducting research on these shows. I suggest that this question is a crystallised form of scrutiny about the marriage show as a reality show format. Along with being inherent to the reality show genre, as I observed in Chapter 1, questioning the realness of the marriage show – i.e. questioning whether the authenticity of participants and events has been manipulated by production staff – is consistent with well-known moral judgements about how the banalities of everyday life which are supposed to be kept as private are represented on TV.

I will argue in this chapter that the suspicion and sarcasm expressed towards the marriage show genre stems from the fact that it is a reality show format, which opens the televisual terrain to the formerly unspeakable themes and subjects of television broadcasting. Until private networks began to be launched, TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Institute), the national broadcaster, was the only source of programming for more than 30 years. As such, it monitored and censored content until the commercialisation and proliferation of television channels after 1991. With the state controls over television content circumvented, new formats, narratives, images and subjects flooded television screens. However, this was not an uncontrolled flow. The process of formulating, adapting and hybridising new televisual formats entailed establishing new filters and forms of framing. In order to provide a backdrop, I sketch the history of television broadcasting from the launch of state-controlled television at the end

of the 1960s, across the changes that took hold in the 1990s, and into the first decade of 2000s through the invention of the marriage show as a popular reality show format.

In this chapter, I locate the format within a continuum of televisual forms, i.e. genres, formats, styles, techniques and technologies which are introduced to Turkish television audiences at particular historical moments. I will first argue that the state television of the pre-1990s period formed the symbolic terrain on which the nation was represented as formulated by the state, and as performed and mediated by its subjects, who produced and consumed the state-sponsored national broadcasts. Then, changes in television broadcasting brought about by the commercialisation process of the 1990s provided new forms of identification with the nation. The changes I point to are basically: changing technologies, forms and relations of production accompanied by changes in the discursive formation. It is also true that every moment of change imbues the nation and its subjects with new ambiguities that complicate ‘who “we” are and what “our” culture is’ (Öncü 2006: 235). That is to say, the newly emergent forms and technologies of communication should be viewed through their role in nation-making process, as well as through their role in producing subject positions in their particularities to form the nation in its totality, which is itself an ambiguous endeavour. As Ahiska remarks in her study on early Turkish radio broadcasting, ‘crafting a national identity has been paradoxically integral to becoming modern (and Westernised) for non-Westerners’ (2010: 8), which was not such an easy conflict to resolve. Technologies of communication have been constitutive of this paradox, providing new devices for and new ambivalences towards nation-making processes through which subjects are endowed with a desire to become modern, as well as sparking a moral panic about the consequences of modernity. This conflict, I will argue, is both performed and resolved through normative negotiations on the televisual terrain by its audiences, producers and participants.

I would like to elaborate on Ahiska's (2010) two main points further to develop my argument. First, she emphasises that technology is not merely a device through which the nation will be Westernised/modernised from above by imposition. Every new technology introduces a new discursive formation based on new temporalities, spatialities, identities and differences that are instrumental in constructing the terms of the nation/national identity. The distinction between high and low culture, the nationalist elite and the masses, and between the national culture and that of ethnic and religious minorities, is constructed daily through communication technologies. While there has always been an actual state violence that suppresses (ethnic, religious, sectarian) *difference* in the nation-making process, radio and subsequently television has been instrumental in silencing these by formulating a 'pure voice' for the nation (Ahiska 2010).

The second point relates to Ahiska's emphasis on subjectivities. Technology was not simply a Westernising tool, a vehicle filled with provisions for the state project of nation-making. As I argued above, new technologies, and accordingly new cultural forms, bring new ambiguities to be resolved in the making of the nation for its subjects. Radio and television are two technologies of production which interpellate subjects into certain positions; these subjects embody the very distinction between high and low culture. I use the Althusserian term *interpellate* in the way Sara Ahmed (2000) uses it. She argues that 'the function of the act of hailing another, "hey you", opens out the possibility *that subjects become differentiated at the very same moment that they are constituted as such*' (2000: 23, emphasis in original). Abu-Lughod (2005) argues that national television broadcasting in Egypt calls audiences to their roles as proper citizens via embodied subjects performing the role of the proper citizen on screen. Ahiska describes Turkish radio broadcasters' role similarly. She argues that 'nationalism in Turkey had to attend first to disciplining its own selected members' (2010: 20). As we will see in subsequent sections, television also created its professionals, who inform, perform and speak *the*

nation on a daily basis, though in a mode which is quite different from the everyday realities of the masses gathered in front of the screen.

What I would like to emphasise here is that Ahiska's study on Turkish radio broadcasting opens up a pathway through which one can trace the relationship between technologies of communication and subjectification, in line with the argument that nation-making is a process of subjectification: how subjects are interpellated to certain positions, how they speak/perform, as well as are spoken to and silenced through certain techniques (practices, equipment and forms) and through representation (formulaic content). Thus the very question that I very often encounter in relation to reality show: '*Is it for real?*' is a question that exceeds the limitations of scrutinising the *realness* of the reality show at a larger scale. I argue that the question has its roots in the very first encounters with mass media apparatuses in Turkey, through which *what is good and proper for the nation* was equated with *the real* through daily television broadcasts. That is to say, the interrogation of the real through television stems from the assumption that television is and must be a venue for representing the nation in all its forms, genres and formats. From the time technologies of communication were launched in Turkey, what is proper has been registered as the reality of the nation through radio dramas, television shows, documentaries, films, serials, educational programs. Accordingly, whenever representations on television exceed the confines of the proper, they are judged to be 'unrealistic'. Thus, both the content (is this how it happens in real life?) and the authenticity of performers (are they 'real people' or actors?) are judged normatively as unrealistic whenever they fail to represent the nation appropriately - i.e. a certain representation of middle-class, educated, Turkish speaking middle classes who are devoted to the well-being of the nation.

To clarify my point, I will move on to trace the launch of television in Turkey and the gradual arrival of varying televisual genres. It is crucial to note that radio and

television have both similarities and differences stemming from their technical qualities, as well as from the historical contexts within which they were introduced to Turkey. As a newer medium, television has also been introduced as a new technological project to be accomplished and a new device for representing the nation through which the masses could be entertained and educated in their homes. Thus, as a technology, television was embraced and promoted; and as a new cultural and representational site, it was subject to long-lasting state control which generated struggles and negotiations over what is good, proper and beautiful for the nation in its totality, and its various subjects in their particularities.

2.1 State Television in Turkey

Television in Turkey first launched in 1952 as a university project at Istanbul Technical University (ITU) in Turkey, targeting a very small urban elite living in Istanbul. It became a nationwide state project at a larger scale with the transfer of ITU TV to the Turkish Radio and Television Institute (TRT) in 1965, and the first trial broadcast of TRT occurred in 1968 with financial and technical support from Germany (Kuyucu 2012; Serim 2007). As an ‘alien technology’ – as Ahiska (2010: 24) described it for the case of radio – from ‘the West’, television was embraced by the Turkish state, established through the collective effort of various state institutions, and consumed by this small urban elite during its first years.

Like public service broadcasting in other contexts, TRT’s content was subject to strict control and censorship (for accounts of some of these other contexts, see Abu-Lughod 2005; Born 2005; Mankekar 1999).⁷ It is crucial to note that, while the content

⁷ According to the ‘Turkish Radio and Television Institute Law’ (359/1963), TRT was defined as an ‘autonomous’ institution under the administration of a board of directors constituted by representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Tourism, universities, national arts institutions and TRT staff, whom are elected independently. The board’s composition undermines the notion of autonomy from the state, which is defined as ‘not being tied directly to the political power’ (Tokgöz, 1972:77; quoted from Topuz, Öngören, Aziz, & Önen, 1990). I think this was also a reservation keeping the institution as a Kemalist state project, and protecting it from the tensions of political debates. After the 1971 military coup,

of TRT broadcasting has always been shaped and re-shaped by the changing cultural policies of governments (Serim 2007), the *problem* of preserving and disseminating national values in local productions and appropriating the imported content from Western sources has always been a primary concern. That is to say, the political struggle over television content was not to do with questioning its nation-making mission (educating the masses and setting national tastes), though its *terms* (content) and tools (formats/genres) were always under scrutiny. Still, the nation-state was an all-encompassing project of a nationalist elite, who took advantage of television's possibilities in service to the project of nation-making while simultaneously trying to eliminate what is regarded as *risky* through strictly formulated content, as had been the case with radio.

An interesting example from Ömer Serim's (2007) memoir of TRT demonstrates how censorship operated through the political debates and tensions of the day, which also shaped government policies. Serim notes that, especially during the Cold War years, communism was conceived as the greatest threat to the well-being of the nation, such that even words deemed reminiscent of communism, socialism, and Soviet Union, or that connoted Marx and Engels, were strictly controlled. He gives the example of a program about Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* being banned because the English word 'jungle' (pronounced *cengel* in the title even though this is not the Turkish translation of 'jungle') too closely resembled *Engels*.

Perhaps the content of Kipling's book itself would also have been deemed suspicious. Nevertheless, the example demonstrates how fastidiously censors examined each word as it drew a line between the dangerous and the safe. Thus, language is the first and foremost tool for controlling, framing and filling content in such a way as to sanitise

some members of the board of directors began to be appointed by the cabinet, while other institutions could only nominate their candidates (Topuz, Öngören, Aziz, Önen, 1990). After 1971, TRT became a battlefield for changing government policy (Serim, 2007; Kejanlıoğlu, 2004).

the social from dangerous representations of (ethnic, political, religious and class) difference. State censorship worked against every word thought to *possibly* have the capacity to conjure feelings or ideas that threatened the unity of the nation. In addition, sounds and speech forms were also formulated to represent the pure voice of the nation in order to keep *dangerous* insiders (other languages, dialects, ethnicities, religious practices and appearances) out of frame. In her study on the shifting boundaries between high and low culture throughout the history of television in Turkey, Öncü portrays how the Turkish Radio and Television Institute (TRT) went about formulating a single voice: a single dialect of Turkish was spoken on television, keeping *other* dialects, *other* languages out of frame. State control over the cultural realm meant that high culture was identified as that of urban elite and middle-class audiences during the first years of television, which also meant that the masses were excluded as 'inferior', and silenced through the promotion of 'correct and beautiful Turkish', as opposed to the *low* Turkish of rural-to-urban migrants and the lower-middle classes, not to mention other languages spoken within the borders of the nation-state (Öncü 2000).

Formulating dominant speech forms as the language of the nation 'lends solidity to cultural boundaries between various segments of society' (Öncü 2000: 300). What I would like to emphasise here is that both radio and television were launched in Turkey as systems of signification that reconstructed and solidified cultural hierarchies that are already part and parcel of the state-driven modernisation process. As Ahıska (2010) remarks, the promise of Turkish national identity was based on a set of 'absent' characteristics: 'the homogeneity of the national population, the existence of common origins, and a common will to the future development of the national state' (2010: 55). The ambivalence of national broadcasting during the period of state monopoly resided in highlighting these characteristics as central to national identity on one side, while drawing a distinction between high and low culture, and setting high culture as the national taste

to be transmitted to the uneducated masses. Identifying broadcasters as performers and mediators of modernity, and as such, superior to the *masses*, state television broadcasts represented class, ethnicity and religion as differences inside the nation, paradoxically by silencing them. The high/low distinction is translated into an indispensable difference between classes, ethnicities and modes of religious practice.

Another crucial point is that, as in the case of radio, television was a Western newcomer, both as technology and to some extent as content; and like radio, the problem of *the West*, that is, crafting a national identity through Western resources, had to be resolved through certain production techniques. The question here is: how was Western content contained within national broadcasting by TRT? The extensive importation of British and American programs during the early years was due to the inadequacy of local production both technically and financially. In addition to this, regarding the distinction between high and low culture, the imported content (films, serials, and documentaries) constituted the category of the high culture. Locally produced programs were also reproductions and adaptations of Western cultural genres/formats: operas, plays, and Western classical music, which were produced by national art institutions (the National State Theatre, National State Opera and Ballet, TRT classical music orchestra, etc.) and broadcast on television (Serim 2007). Thus, as Öncü points out, ‘Western content’ was not regarded as subversive, not only because it was already constitutive of the main axis of modernisation-as-Westernisation, but because it transmitted ‘the voice of the nation’ via standardised Turkish:

All ‘foreign’ programs were mediated through standardized Turkish, dubbed by voices of actors and actresses from the National State Theatre. So all screen characters conversed in the vocabulary, rhythms and narrative forms of ‘correct and beautiful’ Turkish, whether they be members of the Cosby family, or cowboys from the Wild West (2000: 302).

Control of and struggle over representation of the nation was negotiated through certain production techniques in the realm of Western content, but this was much harsher in the realm of local content. In his memoir, Ömer Serim discusses programs that have been banned during the history of TRT. For example, he notes, a documentary series titled *Türkiye'nin Kalkınma Sorunları* (the problems of Turkey on the path to development) was banned because of an episode on 'the impact of road transport on the regression of railway transport' on the basis of 'threatening the unity and integrity of the nation' (Serim, 2007).⁸ Similarly, Serim notes, in 1971, the General Manager of TRT banned a 4-minute short film titled *Yeni Bir Dünya İstiyorum* (I want a new world), which depicted a child desperately running amidst the sound of bombs and gunshots. It is crucial to note that such censorship took place in accordance with the political tensions of the day. I will not go into detail about specific tensions between rightist vs. leftist, secular vs. conservative-religious, statist vs. democratic groups that *claimed* control over state institutions and the state's *voice* – i.e. radio and television. What is relevant to my argument is that all these political tensions were struggling for control of the nationalist project, rather than questioning it as a form of oppression, discrimination and exclusion. In this way, any political message that exceeded the state's hegemonic representational scheme was kept out of frame.

Locally produced television programming in the early years of TRT, similar to early Turkish radio, as well as to television broadcasting in other postcolonial contexts (Abu-Lughod, 2005), were largely the result of efforts by enthusiastic professionals who were devoted to a new profession, and, sharing the hegemonic codes of the nation-state, to the mission of educating and entertaining a newly emerging nation. Perhaps this was a difficult working environment for those very first television professionals, hosts, and

⁸ Serim did not note the exact date, but according to the chronology of the memoir, the incidents took place just before the 1971 military coup.

producers of new formats, having to meet the requirements of state control/censorship, and to overcome the technical and financial difficulties of the period (Serim, 2007). The first local documentaries, quiz shows, serials, and all kinds of live programs were produced with the political engagement of the directors, as well as the creative investment of producers, directors, actors/actresses, writers, etc. I think it is through this embodiment of *the national* among performers/mediators that mass audiences came to identify with the nation by sharing in the pleasures of television entertainment while being educated at the same time.

This homogenised language of televisual communication was imprinted on both locally produced and imported programming throughout the period of state monopoly. While negotiations and struggles occurred over forms of representation as government policy evolved and the cultural and political winds coming from *the West* shifted, the voice of Turkish television broadcasting remained that of the state-led project of modernisation and nation-making throughout TRT's first 30 years.

What I would like to emphasise here is that the actual state violence against those dangerous insiders of the nation was accompanied by a visible tension between what is and is not shown on screen. I argue that their very existence was rendered dangerous through this lack of visibility. Here, I both address state violence against Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Kurds, and Alevis (the list unfortunately can be extended) who continue to be excluded from the dominant narratives of the national past on mainstream media today. Certain manifestations of Sunni Islam were also conceived of as dangerous to the serenity of the nation during the state monopoly, so, for example representations of headscarved women – who were also officially banned from working in the public sector or studying at public institutions until recently (the ban being lifted gradually between 2013 and 2015) – were also absent from state-led television broadcasting.

The exclusion of women with the Islamic veil from the television screen reveals the gendered aspect of the hegemonic representational scheme of television. Noting that the public presence of women has been central to the Kemalist project of modernisation in Turkey, television played its role in framing and representing the role of women within the nation as ‘gentle ladies, respectable housewives, holy mothers’ (Saktanber 1993: 216, translated). This narrow definition of womanhood within a de-sexualised and heterosexist frame restricted the ethnic, political and religious subjectivities of women in special ways.

I will give an example to clarify the main points in relation to state broadcasting. Adile Naşit was a famous actress in the Turkish film industry (*Yeşilçam*) who starred in approximately 100 movies and hosted television programs on TRT during the 1980s. She is best known for the children’s program *Uykudan Önce* (Before bed) as the *Auntie Adile* of my childhood, who told us bedtime stories before she sent us off to dreamland every night. The ways in which national broadcasting set the rhythm of daily life for the whole nation is evident in the title alone. What I would like to emphasise here is that, although we embraced Naşit as a family member, we never knew her life story. Her dangerous secret turned out to be that she was an Armenian. It was years and years after she passed away that I, like many others, learnt that she was actually the daughter of an Armenian actress. Her acceptance and credibility as the mediator of *the national* was possible by only keeping her Armenian identity out of frame, and squeezing her subjectivity into a very narrow representation as the mother of the nation’s children.

How was it possible to keep Armenian identity out of frame? And how, then, was it possible to embrace an Armenian as the mother of the nation, given that one of the conditions for representing the good and proper Turkish nation is *forgetting* the massacres of Armenians and other non-Muslim inhabitants of Turkey? I suggest that the state was able to accomplish this by keeping biographies and personal histories out of frame full stop. That is, the hegemonic scheme of national broadcasting filtered out not only that

which was perceived as dangerous to the serenity of the nation, but also that which enabled subjective enunciations. So Adile Naşit was *the storyteller*, she was chosen as ‘the Mother of the Year’ in 1985, and she was a member of our *family*. Nothing came before or after her role as the model/mediator of a national culture. Her talent was in service to the state agenda of educating children. The only biographical data I know of her, that her child died at a very early age, complements her mythic persona as the ‘mother of the nation’. The filters of subjectivity left little room for this kind of knowledge to be put into the service of a national myth. In this way, forgetting the Armenian Genocide, which also includes sexual violence, kidnapping and the conversion of Armenian women to Islam by marriage, was possible. That is, imagining the nation as a big family was possible by forgetting that Adile was the daughter of an Armenian actress.⁹

I suggest that the issue was not simply that the nation’s past was being sanitised of its faults, but that *autobiography*, as a form that enables the telling of personal life stories in public, was not on the agenda in television broadcasting. That is, I do not imply that only biographies deemed dangerous are silenced; it is the form itself and its potential to introduce conflict and ambiguity to the national representational scheme that is at issue. The project of crystallising and transmitting ‘who we are and what our culture is’ which was mediated by radio and television required a unified voice.

2.2 The 1980 Coup and After: Controlling the Inside, Opening to the Outside

When discussing the violent history of the nation-state in relation to television broadcasting, one must include the 1980 military coup, which ‘set [Turkey’s] democratic development back significantly (Kasaba, 2008: 1).¹⁰ Serim (2007) observes that TRT was

⁹ I refer here to the Armenian Genocide which took place in 1915, under Ottoman rule. It is estimated that at least one million Armenians were killed or deported amid violence and outrage. The Genocide became one of the constitutive secrets of Turkish Republic, which emerged from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire. For an account on the official narratives that mask ethnic violence in political discourse and legislative processes, see Akçam (2007), Göçek (2008). Also see Bilal’s (2013) study on Armenian lullabies for a delicate account on what remains out of the official frames of national representation in Turkey.

¹⁰ Following the coup, the military courts demanded the death penalty for 7000 people, 517 of whom were charged, and 50 of whom were executed. The Turkish Armed Forces declared a state of emergency

directly influenced by military control over state institutions, noting that 40 tons of newspapers and journals, as well as the archives of a television serial, were burned by the military director of TRT.

As stated, TRT broadcasting has always been shaped by political machinations and changing government policies. The military takeover of broadcasting following the coup reveals the depth of the threat to the nation, and to the official account of national history, that was perceived from forces both inside and outside the country during this period. The television serial whose original archives were burned was an adaptation of Kemal Tahir's epic novel about the War of Independence, *Yorgun Savaşçı* (1980) was allegedly told from a socialist perspective, minimising the role of Kemal Atatürk in the war. Similarly, a documentary on the *Çanakkale battle* (1988) was criticised for distorting reality in favour of an Islamist viewpoint by virtue of not having mentioned Kemal Atatürk (Serim 2007). In both cases, the concern was to suppress any tension caused by the dangerous articulation of oppositional politics, which could threaten the unity of the nation.

Although the television screen was still confined within hegemonic state discourse on the nation and its foundational norms, post-1980 Turkey was also opening to the flows of neo-liberalism: following the 1984 democratic elections a conservative politics of rightist governments was coupled with the neo-liberal flow of people, capital and, accordingly, cultural forms. While military violence and control over cultural production was purportedly to protect against 'threats from inside', the military-controlled technocratic government, according to Şevket Pamuk (2008), was an active agent in Turkey's transition to a market-based economy, and thus to its opening to the outside.

The tension between controlling the *inside* and opening to the *outside* was felt on the televisual terrain as well. Ayşe Öncü (2000) describes the 1990s as the 'televisual

throughout the country (Cizre 2008); and 'all political life came to a standstill as the political parties were closed down and former politicians banned from participating in politics' (Ahmad 2008: 254).

moment', marking a significant shift in national broadcasting that ran parallel to several other developments that complicated the meaning of the nation as presented on state television. The launch of commercial television channels transmitted using satellite technology began to permeate the boundaries erected by national broadcasting. Öncü described this as a process generated by 'the blowing winds of neo-liberalism from the transnational arena' (2006: 228), and noted that it generated a rhetoric of 'freedom from state controls', 'opening to the outside', and 'integration to the global economy', by bringing the outside world into the homes of the nation in new and multiplied forms.

It is also crucial to note that besides still owning TRT, the state never disappeared as a control mechanism over commercial television channels. In 1994, soon after commercialisation began to take hold, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) was established 'to classify, interpret and monitor 'offensive content' on commercial television programs' (Öncü 2002: 173)

Of course, as seen above, this was not the first time the Turkish audiences were met with Western images, genres and narratives that set the rhythm of everyday life. What, then, is significant about post-1990s television for our discussion on the specific history of Turkish broadcasting? Öncü argues that privatisation brought about 'a move towards the lowest common denominator of public taste in a variety of national contexts', changing the focus of broadcasting from educating through entertainment to 'light entertainment' (2000: 304). Her depiction of post-privatisation television content as 'lowest common denominator' and 'light entertainment' indicates a bias against programming perceived to be invading television screens from 1991 onwards. Nevertheless, I agree that the hegemonic representational scheme of the state was subverted to some extent with the arrival of a new language, new technologies and a new discursive formation based on consumer choice rather than public service (Öncü 2000). It was within this context of neo-liberal flow that the *banalities* of everyday life, as she

called them, permeated television broadcasting through new genres, forms, formats, styles and speech forms. Accordingly, hybrid speech forms, diverse Islamic representations, and ethnic, religious and class differences found space for representation on television, though still on a very controlled basis (Öncü 2000; 2006).

What is crucial for my argument is that their appearance on the television screen can be analysed neither as a collapse of the idea of nation, nor as a celebration of ‘postmodern pastiche’, to borrow from Öncü (2000) again. These new forms, however, introduced ambiguities into public life that required resolution with respect to the ideal of the ‘proper national subject’:

The entry of television into history at this particular moment, I suggested, brought into the foreground two opposing tendencies associated with the global expansion of media and communication networks. On the one hand, it revealed the fragility of a phalanx of "modern" institutions associated with the nation-state, undermining official scripts of who "we" are and "what we stand for." On the other hand, it brought into play new modes of identification with the abstract nation, by annexing familiar motifs and themes from narratives of nationalism, and reproducing them through visual formats and popular genres of global media culture (Öncü 2005: 245)

The global flow of media images, forms and narratives expanded televisual representation to other forms of identification, such that the boundaries of what symbolised the nation began to be re-drawn. These new forms opened up space for *new* subject positions among the previously excluded masses. Though these shifts did not give the *dangerous insiders* full access to the screen, my argument is that television production acquired new techniques, forms and frames to cut and shape them into proper images and stories. Talk shows, reality shows, melodramas and a variety of other genres and formats began to call the formerly invisible masses to their new positions.

I will elaborate on the kinds of positions opened to the formerly excluded masses later in this chapter. Firstly, I would like to explore how these new subject positions were

constructed. My point here is that the televisual terrain was opened up to the articulation of subjectivities in new and intimate forms: autobiographies, stories of the self, emotional revelations – all of which would be dialogically assessed by the public with the aim of ameliorating subjects' problems as they were *upgraded* from the position of the *dangerous masses* to *ambiguous persons*. In this way, to be politically dangerous could also be framed as the problem of the subject. Television's new forms framed what had been deemed dangerous to the well-being of the nation/nation-making as subjects and their ambiguities that could be resolved. In this way, I suggest that *the political* could be kept off the screen; as a struggle over the limits of self-narration began, new formats and genres were imported and adapted. The secrets of the state and the secrets of the subject, as I maintain in subsequent sections of this chapter, unfolded within the *juxtapolitical* terrain of new forms (Berlant 2011).

Several studies approach these new televisual formats (reality shows, talk shows and other forms of first-person media) as outcomes of discourses on self-help, therapy and amelioration, and empowerment (Illouz 2003; Shattuc 1997; Ouellette and Hay 2008). The flow of images and narratives, the forms/formats that shape and carry those images and narratives, and the capital involved in commercialising television were all accompanied by a new emphasis on self-care that shaped televisual production and generated new formats for global networks and televisual markets. Then, how did this new discursive emphasis on representing the subject generate new forms of identification with the abstract notion of the nation in Turkey? That is, how did the flow of forms and content become intertwined with the struggle over hegemonic representations of the nation in Turkey after 1991? Skeggs and Wood's argument that 'the questions of social structure ... are re-invested through discourses of selfhood and self-responsibility' (2012: 28) is relevant here. I suggest that this is the case for the nation as a very *powerful* structure of subjectification, which is produced and re-produced through new televisual

forms from the outside. In the following sections, I will sketch the 20-year endeavour of television broadcasters, participants and audiences to find ways to formulate what is good/proper/beautiful in the nation within the confines of commercial television.

2.3 Television Genres/Formats after the 1990s in Turkey

What is crucial to the television of post-1990s Turkey is that ‘discourses of the state and the rhetoric of neo-liberal markets [became] intertwined’ (Öncü 2011: 54). Broadcasting after commercialisation was characterised by adaptation/hybridisation, a major programming strategy since the early days of Turkish television, except the genre palette from which it drew became much more diverse. Television serials, films, documentaries, game shows, children’s shows and entertainment programs had prevailed under the state monopoly. As media industries began to grow and become globalised after the 1980s, new and hybrid forms began to be produced in the global *centres* of cultural production and imported to non-Western contexts. Generic variations of these later began to appear on both state and privately owned television channels in Turkey. Binark & Kılıçbay (2004) identifies the 1990s as a trial period for new genres and formats in Turkey. They define hybridisation as a successful combination of ‘imported formats with techniques and themes that will produce those narratives which will move the affective worlds of Turkish audiences’ (Binark and Kılıçbay, 2004: 74, translated). So, they take hybridisation not only as a combination of various genres, but also the articulation of “local” discourses, stories and mediating elements to Western forms’ (2004: 76, translated). In the following sections, I will describe some local/hybrid formats that shaped televisual production in Turkey during the 1990s and early 2000s, transformed the televisual terrain significantly in Turkey, and ultimately led to the production of the marriage show. I will elaborate on four main forms: the talk show genre, which opened up a terrain where dangerous insiders were transformed into ambiguous insiders, and thus were framed as subjects of problems to be resolved; women’s programs, which address

problems of *the intimate*; television serials, which represent those ambiguities as melodramatic conflicts between the virtuous and the villainous; and reality television, which constructs violence and discrimination as individual life stories to be narrated, and if possible, ameliorated. In all these televisual forms, I will argue, the subjects find forms of identification with the idea of the nation.

2.3.1 *The Talk Show*

If one traces back the formats to which the marriage show owes its inheritance, the talk show genre is a good starting point. Çaylı-Rahte (2009) notes that the first talk show was produced for state television, TRT. From 1991 onwards, the private channels that flourished with the release of the state monopoly produced several talk show formats in two main categories/formats: primetime/late night talk shows, and daytime women's programs.

Regarding the primetime format, I will start by describing an early and popular example, one which radically altered the relationship between television programming and its audiences. Those who are familiar with Turkish television during the 90s remember that the most popular talk show was *Siyaset Meydanı*, which kept audiences in front of their screens all Saturday night. It first aired in October 1994 on ATV (Serim 2007). The politically provocative and emotionally intriguing themes, the host as the media persona, and the participation of ordinary people were the three characteristics which marked a significant shift in television production and viewing practices in Turkey, parallel to its global counterparts. *Siyaset Meydanı* was a thematic talk show, each week handling a different topic. The themes varied: freedom of speech, democracy, the death penalty, the Kurdish question (with various titles including 'the reality of PKK', 'terrorism', 'our martyrs', 'Turkey's Kurdish opening', etc. over time), Alevism, Islamism, Armenians, Atatürk, love, sexuality, motherhood, popular media personas, television serials, Turkish cinema, popular music, and so on. This was a clear example

of a space being opened to subjects, themes and questions that had previously been excluded; this development, in combination with the unusual format, kept audiences glued to their screens till morning and generated discussions that continued into the next day.

I will trace some of the qualities of the program as highlighted and discussed in a special issue of the Turkish journal *Birikim*, which describes itself as ‘a monthly socialist journal of culture’. Besides being a popular TV show, *Siyaset Meydanı* sparked discussion about what politics is and who its subjects are. The special issue of *Birikim* hosted an almost representative sample of those discussions. For example, Mahmut Mutman (1995) asked whether the participation of ‘ordinary’ people in a talk show is a form of democratic participation, which is, according to him, the case for its American counterparts. He noted that there are differences between the Turkish public’s enthusiasm and handling of political issues in the imaginary public space of the talk show format, where ‘democracy can be merely an illusion’ (1995: 26, translated). He defines the show as part of a ‘new form of political institutionalisation’, in which ‘citizens are not silenced but constructed as speaking subjects whose words convey purity and transparency by definition’ (1995: 26, translated). He critically asserts that this kind of ‘speaking’, far from being liberating/democratising, is another form of differentiation between the lower classes and the elites (politicians, researchers, businessmen, etc.) based on observation and control instead of silencing. According to Mutman, the participation of the lower classes ‘is not a moment of real consciousness, but a moment of surveillance and pleasure for the elite’. As such, Mutman argues, the program becomes a ‘phantom public space’, with reference to Derrida (Payne and Lewis 1987) constructed through a forgetting of what was sacrificed to democracy in the military coup of 1980.

In the same issue, Ümit Kıvanç, however, distancing himself from a framework of ‘media critique’, emphasises the possibilities of such a show to enable *formerly*

impossible encounters. He points out the specific conditions of Turkey in terms of democracy, 'where channels for self-expression are severely blocked, and where people are not so enthusiastic about opening these channels' (1995: 36, translated). Depicting the hierarchy among guests in three clusters, Kivanç nevertheless asserts that it is during the moments in which the 'seconds' and 'thirds' talk – non-experts and the middle- or lower-class participants sitting in the back seats who, reproducing real-life hierarchies, have a short period during which they can speak up towards the end of the show – that the program becomes realistic and intriguing for its viewers.

In light of these two different accounts on *Siyaset Meydanı*, how can we conceive of the talk show as a new format that constructs a space for different subject positions, and as such, contributes to the invention of the marriage show in Turkey? I think Mutman draws a pathway through which we can trace the contradictions of the political and cultural atmosphere of the 1990s. It was the time when the excluded, silenced masses were flooding to television through particular genres/formats, while at the same time *dangerous insiders* were subject to state violence in the deepest sense of the word: Kurdish political subjects were being imprisoned and tortured, Kurdish villages were being burned, and inhabitants were either being killed or forced to migrate to big cities. Those who were tortured and forced to migrate had (and still have) a long way to go to the television screen to tell the 'pure and transparent truth' (Mutman 1995). Likewise, women were being tortured, raped and subject to violence both at home and outside while women's talk shows filled daytimes with partial representations of female suffering, especially within the family, another formerly unspeakable theme. A simultaneous examination of what was allowed in and what was kept out reveals the ambivalences of the televisual terrain in Turkey: while we viewers were watching the US bombings of Iraq, the Kurdish cities were out of frame. While we were watching Newroz uprisings on

private television channels for the first time, we heard not a word about forced migration and massacres.

But does this make *Siyaset Meydanı*, or television in general, the space of a phantom public, a ‘vague and desirous, real and unreal public’ (Mutman 1995, translated), with reference to Derrida’s point that ‘when the very first perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we are dealing with the realm of phantoms’ (Payne and Lewis 1987)? If *format* is a structure of reproduction according to this framework, subjects and their narratives must be exceeding the realm of *the real*, leaving us with phantoms. While accepting the premise that these programs do not simply reflect *reality* in any sense of the term, calling television the medium of a phantom public at any level, or for any particular format, is an inadequate tool for locating the *the real* through questions like ‘*Is it for real?*’, recalling the discussion at the beginning of this chapter. As I pointed out, the gap between what is *represented* and what is *lived* was translated into *difference*, where *the represented* has been equated with *the real* at the expense of silencing *the lived* on state television.

On the other hand, the space of the talk show format provides new subject positions for formerly excluded people, forming a new frame for what is deemed reality. The talk show genre complicates the distinction between *the represented* and *the lived* by bringing a new definition to *the real*. This time, *the real* is equated with *ordinariness* by providing a space for ordinary people on television.

Nevertheless, the stratified organisation of the guest seats, as Kıvanç (1995) observed, which were established to differentiate first-, second and third-tier speakers, insinuated levels of expertise vs. *ordinariness* among the guests. Both Mutman and Kıvanç acknowledge the hierarchy at play in *Siyaset Meydanı*. The third-tier guests in the back of the audience also had to wait till the very late hours before they could speak. The show thereby reinforced established inequalities through its very format. I suggest that

this was also a form of *showing the real* to a viewership already socialised to these distinctions, as opposed to silencing certain branches of society through structures of domination, exclusion and differentiation, as in the case of state television.

Thus, defining these people, their subject positions, and the space they construct as phantom does not stray far from the everyday critique of participatory television formats as *unreal*. Kivanç's framework, on the other hand, is a reminder that commercial television brought new possibilities to the televisual terrain: new forms, new frames, new formats and genres which opened up a space composed of new subject positions for those formerly excluded. This new discursive formulation seems to open the possibility of speaking the unspeakable, with which I agree to some extent. However, what I will try to show in this dissertation is that the new formats and genres, and the new techniques used to produce these programs and their subjects, both make use of and limit these possibilities. The talk show format was modified in order to sanitise television from the dangerous enunciations of the unspeakable, especially after 2005, when the new subjective formats reached a dangerous edge. I will clarify the characterisation 'dangerous edge' in the following section.

2.3.2 *Women's programs*

During the 1990s, new formats opened television screens to articulations of the conflicts, ambiguities and problems of ordinary people, though presented them in gender differentiated settings. This differentiation can be seen in two types of talk shows. While primetime talk shows were known as *discussion programs*, daytime talk shows, which were hosted by women and focused on so-called women's problems, were categorised as *women's programs*. *Siyaset Meydanı* had been conceived as a *quality* talk show, falling into the category of serious programming. While it was based on the eyewitness reports, commentary and biographical accounts of ordinary people, it was not regarded as a show for 'airing dirty laundry' as in the case of its American counterparts (Grindstaff, 2002).

While issues like investment in democratisation, freedom of speech, etc. were debated on *Siyaset Meydanı*, women's programs were criticised for exposing the private and personal to the public gaze.

Women's programs¹¹ appropriated the talk show format to the tastes of daytime audiences. Çaylı-Rahte describes the distinctive features of the format as follows: 'They handle the lives of ordinary people, troubles in family and marriage, and domestic violence; and compared to other programs, the audiences are much more active' (2009: 191, translated). Focusing on programs like *İnci Ertuğrul Sizin Sesiniz* (İnci Ertuğrul is Your Voice), *Serap Ezgü ile Biz Bize* (Together with Serap Ezgü), which were popular during late 1990s and early 2000s, Çaylı-Rahte argues that the gendering of television genres is evidence of the male domination of the media, where what belongs to women are the leftovers of the main broadcasting lineup. As a result, the categories of man and woman become superimposed over those of high and low culture.

Yet the gendering of talk shows is not simply about male domination of the media; it is also the outcome of a broader construct within which women represent the family, and women's programs are therefore focused on family-related issues. That is, the idea of the 'women's program' not only reproduces a distinction that associates women with the low, the unspeakable and the dirty laundry, but also follows an already-established gendered division within which women are constructed as subjects first and foremost *within* the family. Meanwhile, men are constructed as subjects relating to the more serious aspects of life – politics, economics at both the macro and micro (e.g. provisioning the family) levels. As a result, the terms 'woman' and 'family' are used interchangeably in Turkey at various levels (Alkan-Zeybek 2011). This is exactly what happens when these shows are described as women's programs, even though guests may be any member of

¹¹ Çaylı-Rahte (2009) distinguishes women's programs from women's talk shows, with the latter being much closer to an entertainment format. This distinction is inevitable and useful for a deeper analysis, yet I will generalise both under the rubric of 'women's programs' in this section for the sake of simplicity, and since they are popularly understood as a single category.

the family. Öncü (2006) also made the point that daytime talk shows in Turkey do not only target a female audience, but a mixed audience of women working at home, the retired, and unemployed men who, considering Turkey's high unemployment rates, constitute a significant portion of the population. I can also add to this list those working in flexible jobs, students, old and/or disabled people, and people suffering from chronic illnesses who are less able to go out due to poor accessibility policies, etc. In short, so-called women's programs neither target nor host exclusively women.

What I would like to emphasise is that it is through these programs the self-narratives/biographical accounts of ordinary people gain value within the exchange circuit of commercial television (Skeggs and Wood 2008). That is, a set of new televisual formats has been imported to Turkish television channels whose programming is based on the telling of one's self and has been identified in various studies as first-person, therapeutic and confessional (Illouz 2003; Shattuc 1997). Women's programs in Turkey appropriated these formats' demand for personal narrative; consequently, what was formerly personal and unspoken in the public sphere found its way onto television screens. Stories of abuse in childhood, domestic violence, forbidden love affairs, runaway women, etc. were narrated daily in the intimate milieu of the talk show, doubtless moving Turkish audiences affectively, with subjects investing in this value circuit. From this perspective, far from being *phantom* publics (Mutman 1995), these programs became an extension of people's intimate lives, through which they would become subjects of a new discursive formation.

It is crucial to underline here that, as I observed above, the content of women's programs is dominated by domestic issues, especially those of familial crisis. Nevertheless, as I will elaborate in Part 3 (Chapters 6-8), there is a limit to what can be revealed in the public (Tuncer 2014), and these limits also constitute the limits of female subjectivity. Thus, this gendering brings with it a whole package of norms about what

women can do and tell, or where and how women move in public (Tuncer 2014). Noting that women's programs are intimate *publics* which enhance and encourage revelations about *the private* through certain forms of narration, women's revelations were not (always) appreciated by those with whom they have personal and familial relationships. Moreover, the limit to self-narration can be a dangerous one, if we take a series of killings and suicides which took place during 2005 into account. Çaylı-Rahte (2009) records that five killings – three of the victims being women – and a suicide were the direct result of appearances on such programs.¹² The format of these highly rated women's programs changed significantly after the killings, being replaced by 'safer' formats. Before elaborating on what changed, I think further exploration is needed to understand these incidents.

How can we conceive of this *dangerous edge* to self-narration? As I maintained earlier, *representation* is the constitutive element of nation-making. Not only does the gap between what is represented and what is lived constituted as the difference between the high and the low culture, what resides in that gap is *the intimate*, where the 'secrets of the family' should be kept for the nation's well-being (Sirman 2002). In her analysis of *the nuclear family* as the prevailing and privileged form of intimacy for the making of

¹² Çaylı-Rahte notes 4 cases of killings and one suicide:

- April 2005. A family was attacked after participating in the program *Kadının Sesi* (Woman's Voice). The family participated in the show after their daughter was killed in the name of honour by her husband, whom she married under *berdel* [bride exchange]. The groom's father fired at the family's car and killed his daughter's husband and a policeman.

- May 2005. A female guest on *Kadının Sesi* was killed by her son aged 14, on her way home.

- November 2005. A jobless man who participated in a *Kadının Sesi* episode made a call on the air to his wife, who had left home with her children because of his violence. After his wife's refusal to return, he killed her on the street.

- November 2005. A married mother of two children who participated in *Ayşe Özgün ile Her Gün* (Every day with Ayşe Özgün) said on the program that she had been raped by her father during childhood. Wearing a wig and sunglasses, she complained about her family on other programs as well. Afterwards, she was found dead in her house, having been killed by her father. The killer was sentenced to life imprisonment, which was later reduced to 15 years due to grievous provocation and good conduct.

- November 2005. A married father of two children was accused on the Serap Ezgü Show of kidnapping an under-aged girl by the girl's family. Afterwards, the man committed suicide, leaving a note reading "Serap Ezgü is responsible for my death" (Çaylı-Rahte 2009: 204, translated from Turkish).

the Turkish nation and its subjects, Sirman argues that one of the duties of both female and male subjects of the nation is to keep its secrets, which is illuminated with the proverb '*kol kırılır yen içinde kalır*' (the broken arm stays in the sleeve). Indeed what this proverb uncovers is that the secret is usually a painful one. So the burden of keeping the arm in the sleeve constructs a subjectivity out of the act of keeping the secret (Sirman, 2002). Thus, to keep the secrets of the family is a constructive duty in becoming a proper subject of the nation, which is not a very easy responsibility to fulfill. Pointing to the difficulty of self-narrative within a regime of secrets, Sirman notes that 'middle class women over 65 have difficulty saying "I" while telling their life stories, or the men prescribe solutions for Turkey's problems instead of telling their life stories; which are the traces of the price they paid to become proper subjects' (Sirman 2002: 244, translated). I argue that this is the reason these subjects' entrance into a new normative domain – one where they are expected to make private matters public – can be a fatal move. Speaking the unspeakable as a norm of the format, which is based on a new (neo-liberal) subjectivity, clashes with the discretionary norms of family/nation in Turkey, ending in violence for those who passed the dangerous edge. Thus, I argue that this violence was generated by a conflict between norms.

After the 2005 killings, it seemed clear that the format of women's programs required intervention, and this relates to the emergence of the marriage show as a new format. Çaylı-Rahte notes that, as a result of the audience's complaints to the Radio and Television Supreme Council the format was gradually transformed, shifting its focus from detailing family crises to reuniting loved ones and matchmaking.

What I would like to underline here is that the invention of new formats, or the adaptation and hybridisation of imported formats, was not simply the result of the demands of the television market. As I pointed out, conflict between the normative order of (neo-liberal) subjecthood, based on a self-assertive individual who seeks to survive and

flourish, and the national/familial normative order, which produces women as subjects only within the family and as gatekeepers to the private sphere, was resolved with the invention of new formats. I contend that the marriage show is one of the formats to emerge in reaction to 2005 (although Çaylı-Rahte does not specifically name it), as producers searched for safer ways to handle *the private*. The marriage show can be conceived as an endeavour for producing a safe format, incorporating self-narrative with national-familial subjecthood successfully.

So far, this brief review of daytime women's programs and primetime talk shows indicates that television has been a controversial medium throughout its 50-year history, and the intensity of the controversy has increased considerably since commercialisation. The terms and forms of those controversies are negotiated according to the contemporary discursive formation/regime of truth. What is crucial is that the normative order of the nation/nation-state, far from being weakened after commercialisation, has been reconstructed in talk shows in various ways. What is at stake in these appropriations and negotiations, still, is an endeavour for what is good and proper for the nation. Moreover, it is still an issue of encountering the West as a *constant* newcomer through imported forms, formats and genres. As stated before, the practices and projects of nation-making form a complicated process of subject-making, which seizes and appropriates new cultural forms, formats and genres. A focus on how the marriage show appropriates these different and conflictual normative orders will provide the basis for understanding the contemporary national and familial subjectivities at play.

2.3.3 *Melodrama*

Although completely a different genre, I think television serials have also contributed to the shaping of the marriage show as a new television format, and so warrant a brief overview. Indeed melodrama as a genre shaped various cultural forms in Turkey long before the launch of television technology. Its roots lie in early Turkish cinema, radio

dramas and the early Turkish novel. Its multi-generic affiliations are worthy of a longer analysis, yet I will confine my review to that which supports my main argument that, just as talk shows and women's programs are hybrid/local formats, the melodrama, a dominant genre among locally produced television serials during the 1990s opened up a terrain where the formerly unspeakable comes to be represented.

During the first 20 years of TRT, adaptations of early Turkish novels (e.g. *Aşk-ı Memnu*, *Çalılıkusu*), narratives of the Ottoman past (*Kuruluş*) and the War of Independence (*Küçük Ağa*) were accompanied by Brazilian telenovelas, American soap operas and sitcoms. Locally produced comedies/sitcoms like *Perihan Abla* and *Bizimkiler* also had an established place within the television schedule. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the number of television serials rose in parallel to commercialisation and the proliferation of television channels. This was accompanied by genre and content variation. Sitcoms, melodramas, cop dramas, and more specific categories like 'Eastern serials' have been produced since 1990.

In my own research on one of the most popular television serials of the early 2000s, *Asmalı Konak*, I focused on melodrama as a genre, and depicted how it was appropriated into postcolonial contexts: the melodramatic conflict between protagonists and antagonists was translated into a moral conflict between becoming modern and preserving national values. To put it simply, the traditional order represented by an 'Eastern man' was tamed in the hands of a modern woman who represented love as a natural power. It is also crucial to note that the change was coming in the hands of Bahar, the female protagonist, who came from the outside, the modern world, and who learnt to cope with the conflicts and tensions in the family caused by her love for Seymen the male protagonist. In due course, her love was also tamed for making of the modern nuclear family, devoid of the dangers of excessive traditionalism, as well as the destructiveness of excessive feelings. Thus, similar to the 'alien women' as mythical founder of the nation

(Lewis, 2005), the ‘modern woman’ in melodrama is an ambivalent subject, who is capable of bringing change at the expense of changing herself, and as such, constituting the limits of modernisation.

As such, the everyday ambiguities that the people (of the nation) deal with, which are not so easy to resolve, are scripted into a love story, and resolved in the hands of the female heroine. Accordingly, the types of normative conflicts that never reach resolution on talk shows – even ending in violence and death – can be condensed into melodramatic conflict. Thus, melodrama provided a formula with which to contend with the gap between what is represented and what is lived, through a second order of representing the *unrepresented* within a fictive world.

In this way, the formerly unspeakable, *dangerous insiders* of the nation came into representation, framed into a melodramatic conflict, and their status shifted to that of *ambiguous insiders*. The Kurdish ‘issue’, male violence, poverty/economic crisis, which had been outside the television frame, were absorbed into melodrama in various ways. It is crucial to note that these serials borrowed from the codes of Turkish cinema, an older and relatively autonomous sector compared to state television, so melodramatic conflicts and their resolutions have always been part of the people’s tastes in Turkey. In a similar manner, the resolution of conflictual encounters with the West had also been the main content of early radio drama and novels (Ahıska, 2010; Sirman, 2000). Then what is distinctive for televised melodramas is that they deal with contemporary political ambiguities through established codes. I will use the ‘Kurdish issue’, as an example. The popular TV serials *Zerda* (2002, ATV), *Aşka Sürgün* (2005, ATV), *Sıla* (2006, ATV), *Bir Bulut Olsam* (2009, Kanal D), and a variety of others can exemplify the formulaic plots produced about Kurdish people – though they are never named as such – noting that there are always limits to the extension of the television screen to *formerly* excluded issues. Rather, these serials are described as ‘Eastern’ serials’, ‘Ağa/Patriarch’ serials, or

‘Töre/Tradition’ serials among the Turkish-speaking public. Thus the emphasis shifts from an ethnic conflict to a problem of geography, or customs and traditions of a particular social or economic structure (i.e. tribal, feudal) which is deemed backward within the trajectory of modernisation in Turkey. Accordingly, Öncü observes that these serials portray the East as a harsh, closed geography, and as a distant past. While confining the ‘Kurdish question’ to this symbolic language of empty lands, backwardness, and excessive violence (Öncü 2011) and an eroticised male body (Sirman 2007), the subjects *trapped* in these distant and sealed geographies are portrayed as being in conflict between their desires and the social order. The catalyst of transformation is an outsider: a modern subject (usually a woman) who permeates the *dangerous* geography of the East through love. Thus, I argue that televised melodramas in Turkey produce representations of female and male subjects who struggle against customs and traditions, and what is more, struggle with themselves in order to become proper subjects of love, proper subjects of nuclear families and ultimately, proper subjects of the nation.

I think several qualities of melodrama as a genre have contributed to the invention of the marriage show. First, as with the talk show genre, melodrama after the 1990s began to let those kept out by state television in. They are framed in such a way as to meet commercial television’s promise to show the unexpected, the formerly unknown, or unspeakable, while also keeping audiences in front of the screen. Moreover, melodrama is a mode for negotiating the limits of the unspeakable. If state television silenced differences and controversies, commercial television negotiated norms, articulating them through melodrama.

Finally, these negotiations were performed by the two main protagonists of the melodrama: the male and female subjects of a love story. Melodrama opens up positions for subjects endowed with the agentive power to change the existing social order through love. As normative conflicts are condensed within a love story, their resolution entails a

subjectivity which is endowed with the capacity to resolve. I think this also contributes to opening up a space for narrating the self among participants in a marriage show, who move into this space with the expectation of getting married. The limits of these narratives, however, are drawn by format. I elaborate on this point throughout my analysis of the marriage show and its participants in the following chapters.

2.3.4 *Reality Television*

Reality television is an abstraction describing a myriad of formats produced, reproduced, adapted, and hybridised in a variety of cultural contexts across the globe, where the American and British television industries (still) occupy a central place. Annette Hill (2005) discusses these two main actors in generating reality television: American tabloid television and the documentary tradition of British public service broadcasting have jointly contributed to the range of reality television formats. The formats and their localisation/hybridisation in different contexts make it difficult to describe the genre. Indeed, reality television is the umbrella term for an endless range of possible production formats.

The very first reality show that I remember, which was aired during late 1980s on TRT, was *Rescue 911*, an American docudrama based on real rescue stories. The show was dubbed in Turkish. After the commercialisation of television broadcast, many more and varied types of reality shows began to appear on the privately owned commercial television channels. Serim (2007) marks *Kayıp Aranıyor*, *Adliye Koridorları* (missing-person and crime shows) as the first of these. The very first dating show, *Saklambaç* (Hide and Seek), is also noteworthy. Serim notes that *Saklambaç* was an exact ‘replica’¹³

¹³ ‘Replica’ is a judgemental description, since something replicating the Western without adaptation/modification is always suspicious for the ‘well-being’ of the nation. The longtime judgemental motto against Turkish elites within Islamist political discourse is of their purported ‘mentality of imitation’. Interestingly, this suspicion towards Western replicas also dominated the discourse of the nationalist elite, like Ömer Serim, one of the first TRT broadcasters and the author of ‘The History of TRT’.

of American and British dating shows. The format put one woman/man and three men/women in the studio, without seeing each other. The three suitors answer questions posed by the candidate, who is seated behind a screen, and she/he chooses one for a date based on their answers. *Saklambaç* was not successful in Turkey, perhaps because of its unusual format. I remember that, as a very young television viewer of 11 or 12, I found the show charming and funny, yet not very persuasive: how can a woman/man choose a suitor behind a screen based on hypothetical scenario questions like, ‘*Suppose that you’re booking a surprise holiday for us, where would you take me?*’, or ‘*Tell me how you imagine we would spend our first anniversary*’. It was really weird for me. Perhaps the program was not taken seriously because the stakes were just a single date rather than a more serious relationship. Or, perhaps it was taken seriously and judged as corrupt and immoral for the same reasons – because it was perceived as frivolous.

Though the show disappeared in a very short period from Turkish televisions, I think it contributed to the production of a set of matrimonial reality shows like *Ben Evleniyorum* (I’m Getting Married), which I discuss later in this chapter. In addition to the issue of format, like the blind panel behind the folding screen, and trying to get to know each other through questions – both of which resemble the marriage show format – *Saklambaç* opened up a space for its audiences to discuss how to go about plausibly creating a marriageable persona, whether serious relationships could be arranged on television, and whether doing so would be complementary to ‘Turkish family values and morality’. These discussions continue with regards to the marriage show format.

These first experiments with reality shows (and a variety of other formats like cop shows, docu-soaps, etc.) consisted of foreign adaptations, including *Biri Bizi Gözetliyor* (an adaptation of Taxi Orange/Big Brother) and *Popstar, Akademi Türkiye* (adaptations of Pop Idol), *Yemekteyiz* (adaptation of Come Dine with Me), along with local-hybrid formats such as *Ben Evleniyorum* (I’m Getting Married) and *Gelinim Olur musun* (Will

You Be My Daughter-in-Law) during the first decade of the 2000s.¹⁴ Among these, *Ben Evleniyorum* and *Gelinim Olur musun*, as spin-offs of the *Biri Bizi Gözetliyor* (*Big Brother*) format, are remarkable in terms of hybridisation and adaptation. Their formats are very similar to *Big Brother*, and to some extent to *Joe Millionaire*. In the first, *Ben Evleniyorum*, a number of men and women lived in the same house with the aim of getting married in the end. The program aired first in 2003, and its format evolved quickly into another, in which grooms-to-be were accompanied by their mothers into the house. In *Gelinim Olur musun*, mothers selected brides for their sons.

These adaptations and hybridisations have been shaping Turkish reality television since the beginning of the 1990s. Today, talent shows, pop idol shows, fashion and decoration shows, and finally marriage shows fill the daytime and primetime programming slots of various television networks. Reality television, and specifically matrimonial reality formats have cleared a path along which the marriage show may be produced in negotiation with audiences who are already competent in discussing love and relationships on television in both emotional and normative terms.

It is obvious that the marriage show is a product of the flow of reality television and its constant search for new forms: the reality TV genre is sustained by ‘cannibalising’ formats and constantly producing new ones for the market (Hill, 2005). However, as in the case of women’s programs, reality show formats in Turkey were transformed not merely as a result of market demand, but after the tragic end to one of the first matrimonial reality shows, again in 2005.

Ata, a participant in the show *Gelinim Olur musun* (Will You Be My Daughter-in-Law), fell in love with one of the contestants, Sinem, but his mother’s opposition prevented them from marrying. Semra, the mother of Ata, became an icon of normative

¹⁴ Some of these shows reappeared under different names. I listed only the first adaptation of an imported format here.

assessments about marriage with her cruel judgements of Sinem. Though they did not win the final prize, the three main protagonists of this love story became famous, participating in a variety of spin-off shows. A few years later, however, Semra was tragically faced with her son's sudden death from a drug overdose in a hotel room.

Ata's death generated a heated discussion on reality television in Turkey, especially relating to voyeurism and commercialisation. A newspaper article of the day illustrates how the case was debated in Turkey: 'Let's talk about how much profit the television sector, which surrounds the audience like an octopus, made from ratings-adverts, televoting, music albums in the last 5 years' (Dündar 2005; quoted in Serim 2007, translated). I think this critique is worth thinking about, but surely the story is much more complicated. What this tragic event, together with the five killings and the suicide in the same year (discussed in section 2.3.2), tells us about television in Turkey is that this was a turning point for producers, who were faced with the fact that adaptations of global formats into the national broadcast were ending in normative conflicts. As television extended its landscape into the everyday lives of the ambiguous masses, and as those ambiguous masses gained access to television, the everyday conflicts that people face acquired a new framework. While producing exchange value in reality television on a daily basis through self-narratives, Turkish broadcasters, audiences and participants faced the limits of this new discursive formation.

Thus, the reality show genre in Turkey had to transform itself according to the limits of self-narration, the family and the private lives of the subject. I suggest that the 30-year history of reality TV in Turkey can be read as a quest for those safer formats. The formats imported and adapted after 2005 are indicative of the place this quest has reached so far. The formats of *Survivor*, *Var mısın Yok musun* (Deal or No Deal), *Kim Milyoner Olmak İster* (Who Wants to be a Millionaire), and a variety of talent shows like *Yetenek Sizsiniz* (equivalent to America's/Britain's Got Talent), *O Ses Türkiye* (Voice of Turkey)

dominate the primetime and late-night flow of programming, even earning higher ratings than their scripted counterparts on the popular melodramas. Fashion shows like *Bugün Ne Giysem* (What to Wear Today), home-decoration shows like *Evim Şahane* (My Marvellous House) and marriage shows fill the daytime television schedule in Turkey. All of these, like their Western counterparts, are *still* based on self-narratives, biographies, and a sense of agency which motivate people to change their lives through an appearance on television.

This is the framework within which I examine the marriage show. What, then, is distinctive about the marriage show that makes it specific to Turkish television broadcasting? Why can it be regarded as a safer format than women's programs or other matrimonial formats? I will provide a brief description in the section below, and seek to answer this question over the course of the dissertation.

2.3.5 The Marriage Show

I do not think it is an oversimplification to say that the marriage show is an outcome of a series of formats and related crises that played out throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. It inherited from these genres/formats a competent audience for making moral judgements, a developed media industry competent in formulating shows compatible with audience expectations and the way norms are negotiated in everyday life, and a huge number of potential participants who found pathways to representation within the television frame.

The first marriage show was named *Dest-i İzdivaç* (an Ottoman Turkish proverb which means *Marriage Proposal*), which was produced in 2007 for Flash TV and hosted by Esra Erol. The program was very popular and received high ratings. It was later transferred from network to network: first Star TV (*İzdivaç* 2008), then back to ATV (*Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle* 2010-2013), and finally Fox, with the new title "*Esra Erol'la*". There have also been several other shows with similar formats on national

daytime television: *İzdivaç* was hosted on Star TV by Zühal Topal for 2 more years (2010-2012) after Esra Erol, and *Su Gibi* (2007-2013) by Uğur Arslan and Songül Karlı on Fox before Esra Erol. Indeed there was major competition in the daytime schedule among networks looking to duplicate the success of Esra Erol's show; there remains no doubt that as the innovator of the format, she is the most popular marriage show host in Turkey.

The format can be described briefly as follows: participants in the show are looking for a groom or bride. They describe themselves and their lives on stage, along with their expectations of marriage. Finally, an open call is put out for interested suitors, who call in to express that interest. Some of these may be invited by the candidate to participate. The candidate can (and usually does) meet more than one prospective spouse one by one, before deciding to continue meeting one candidate outside of the program. After a time, they return to the show and describe their experiences and intentions. They may either decide to continue meeting with each other or go their separate ways, in which case they may either leave the show or continue meeting other suitors. The rules/conventions of the program are crucial to the format: candidates may not schedule meetings or make relationship-related decisions outside the purview of the show; for example, they may not decide to live together. If they decide to marry, the marriage ceremony also takes place on a live broadcast. The program is solely dedicated to the pursuit of marriage, and all other relationship types between couples who meet on the show are forbidden.

As this brief description shows, the marriage show is a strictly regulated format, dedicated to making a (socially sanctioned) process of courtship and marriage open to the public gaze and public judgement. I will argue that this is a new form of subjectification, in the broadest sense, through which the men and women of the nation are submitted to the norms of the family by narrating their lives and their future expectations. It is an innovative format which assimilates the generic conventions of the reality show in order to maintain the norms entailing, first and foremost, the proper family in Turkey. In this

way, the speaking of the unspeakable, the representation of the formerly excluded, and the formation of differentiated subject positions for different subjects, can be deemed safer, given that they talk and perform within the normative frames of the show, as I argue in Chapter 5.

2.4 Conclusion to Chapter 2

In this chapter, I tried to depict a general picture of television in Turkey, by specifically focusing on the emergence in new forms, along with the changing forms of state control over television broadcast. In conclusion to this endeavour, I would like to underline that television gradually came to form an intimate public where formats are hybridised and adapted in order not to exceed the safe limits of self-narration and self-assertiveness. The space opened up for articulating subjectivities, narrating biographies and investing them into the value circuit of reality television is framed and delimited through new formats: reality television in Turkey, towards the second decade of the 2000s, developed formats which frame subjectivity to make maximum profit by minimising the *dangers* of showing what has been silenced or kept private.

I pointed out that the question ‘Is it for real?’ is a form of judgement towards the marriage show, as well as all other formats (reality formats, talk shows and television serials) which are judged to be ‘unrealistic’, paradoxically because they do not comply with the framings previously established by state television. I suggest this is because these safe limits remain under scrutiny and negotiation. For example, the serial *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* has become a source of debate for distorting the image of ‘our ancestors’ because it depicts the Ottoman sultan Süleyman having sex with women in the harem, who are dressed in immodest costumes. The then-prime minister and the Radio and Television Supreme Council took part in this debate, fining the serial for violating RTÜK regulation

3984 by airing content ‘contrary to society’s national and spiritual values’.¹⁵ Thus, the state has always been part of the endeavour to maintain the discursive boundary between the public and the private, as well as of hidden aspects of the (national/familial/personal) past, i.e. secrets.

In a similar manner, the marriage show has also been the target of public criticism, not only for being unrealistic, but also for endangering Turkish ‘family values’. Over seven years on the air, Esra Erol’s shows have been criticised by state officials at the highest levels. What I would like to say is that there is never a safe end for television and the people it depicts because the nation-making process involves constantly drawing limits wherever people move. In the case of reality television, people moved from an assumed passive position as the audience (which was never the case indeed), to the position of active participant in the show, which opened up a new milieu for drawing limits and constraining movements. Furthermore, the show’s matchmaking format opens up new and contested terrain which is used to discuss and maintain the *limits* to the subjects who will form the new families of the nation.

In the subsequent chapters, I elaborate on how the safe limits are maintained in the production process of the marriage show (mainly Chapters 6, 7 and 8); and how these safe limits operate for the subjects throughout their participation in the show (mainly Chapters 4 and 5). Therefore, I handle the production process of the show as the making of the marriage show and making of the marriageable subjects by endowing the frames of the television with the norms of marriage and matchmaking. I begin this endeavour by locating myself within the frames of the marriage show in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

¹⁵ ‘RTÜK’ten Muhteşem Yüzyıl’a uyarı cezası’. *Hürriyet*, January 12, 2011 [online]. Available from: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr> [accessed February 16, 2015].

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This is an ethnographic study of a television show in Turkey, namely *Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle* (Marry Me on the Esra Erol Show). In the broadest sense, I use ethnography as a set of research and writing methods generated from social anthropology and embraced by various sub-disciplines/approaches within social research (see Agar 1996; Atkinson, Delamont, Coffey, Lofland, and Lofland 2007). I anchor my study to a literature on television ethnography, keeping track of seminal studies conducted in different contexts (Abu-Lughod 2005; Mankekar 1999; Grindstaff 2002; Skeggs and Wood 2012). Though the contexts and the particular genres they focus on vary, what is common to these studies is their questioning of the division between production and consumption, and/or broadcasting and viewing, emphasising that the two are interconnected strands of a complicated process, and that production, consumption/viewing, participation, policy-making, and public debate and judgement are interrelated practices.

Taking the marriage show as a specific iteration of these practices, I focus on television participation through fieldwork conducted between September 2011 and June 2012 at the ATV network. I take the participation of the subjects in the show to be a slice of ongoing production activities and people that constitute the show in a particular moment, in a certain context. That is, the participation activities I explore here are part of larger processes of production, including the narratives, meanings and feelings generated through those processes, and subjects moving within/involved in those processes.

Within this framework, I conducted my research with the aim of answering two sets of questions. First, what are the specific techniques, processes and content that make the marriage show a new and distinctive reality show format? As a newly emergent and locally produced format, can it be described as a cultural form specific to Turkish television broadcasting? How are the techniques and conventions of the format informed

by the cultural and historical baggage that are invested in its production? While acknowledging the show as a new and distinctive format, at a second level, I have traced the marriage show as a pathway to marriage, and asked: how is it produced and promoted as a new and acceptable pathway to marriage for its participants?

In pursuit of these broad questions, I conducted regular field visits to ATV's Yenibosna Studios in Istanbul between 19 September 2011 and 29 June 2012, as well as occasional visits thereafter during the write-up process. During my visits, I visited almost all places and rooms in the studio building. Besides observations and field notes, I conducted 62 interviews during the fieldwork with the staff and the candidates (see Appendix for a full list of interviewees and candidates I referred to throughout the thesis). I also conducted 10 tape-recorded audience interviews, along with informal conversations, though I did not directly use them in my analysis. I briefly told all of the interviewees that I am conducting a doctoral research, and took their oral consent for tape-recording the conversations. Sharing a broadcast season backstage with staff members, candidates and the audience, I had rare access to the show, which I try to do justice to in this dissertation.

In this chapter, I will first try to depict the landscape I studied – the field, and the pathways I took within it. Later on, I will elaborate on the ethnographic research tools employed – mainly participant observation and interviews.

3.1 Defining the field: The Space of the Marriage Show

From the first visit, I began thinking about defining the boundaries of my field, which seemed not so easy when the object of inquiry was a television show. During my fieldwork, I regularly crossed almost half of the city to get to the studio. It was during these long commutes that I began thinking about the space of the television show I was studying, which is constituted by several places and routes at different levels: routes that people follow in order to participate in the show, the places used by marriage show staff

and participants during the production process (various places within the studio, the ports and vehicles they use in their travels, the hotels they stay in, various places they gather, eat, drink and rest), multiple environments in which audiences watch/listen/consume the show and so on. As I accounted for these different layers, I realised the difficulty of drawing the contours of the field.

There is no doubt that the difficulty in defining and confining the field is not unique to this study. As Agar puts it:

One no longer studies isolated, cradle-to-grave communities; one studies citizens and immigrants in turbulent states that are part of the world. One no longer reports fixed traditions; one deals with ongoing processes of change. One no longer limits the research to meanings and contexts; one includes the power that holds those meanings and contexts in place. Groups no longer have clear edges, and people present multiple and often conflicting identities, some of them rooted outside the community (1996: 11).

From this point of view, *the field* in ethnographic research is a multi-layered space which is produced and reproduced within the grid of turbulent states, processes of change, and multiple and conflicting identities. In line with Agar's argument, I acknowledge that television as a research site complicates the definition of the field as a space in its own way. In her seminal study on Egyptian television dramas, Abu-Lughod outlines different aspects of television that a comprehensive ethnographic study should cover in order to 'trace (this) enmeshment of television in other social fields' (2005: 32): the televisual text, its production and reception, and the subjects involved in these complex processes of television production and viewing. Once these complex processes are framed within a single field of view – either the production or the reception site – we are usually left not with a comprehensive picture of television, but with, as Abu-Lughod puts it, 'a fragmentary sense of the everyday lives, social connections, and concerns of the people interviewed, or of the diversity of viewing communities' (2005: 33). How to handle

different, interrelated aspects of television production and viewing practices, and their relation to other/wider social phenomena, is the main question of ethnographic accounts of television.

On the other hand, I suggest studies on the reality show genre have the potential to overcome the problem of *partiality* to some extent, largely owing to the characteristics of the genre. As a television genre reliant on audience participation and intervention into the production process – both as the main actors and the audience – reality shows may be a fruitful research site/object for those who want to develop an all-inclusive focus that captures production, reception and text at a glance. This was also one of my initial motivations for studying the marriage show: to handle multiple aspects of a specific television show by narrowing the field to the production space, and taking participation as the central focus.

Nevertheless, television broadcasting in general, and the reality show in particular, introduce additional dimensions to the field that not only complicate the boundaries of the field, but also require the researcher to have access to new research tools and analytical pathways. Moores (2004) points to the pluralising of places and relations through various technologies of communication. He argues that televised events, internet-based communication and cell phone use are three distinct modes of *doubling* place, which connects the place of the producer/user/viewer/consumer to other places of production/use/viewing/consuming. Among these, he takes the live televised event as a form of doubling of place (and relations) which produces a connection between a particular event taking place elsewhere and a viewer positioned in front of the television screen, who is surrounded by a set of relations. It is in this way that the event is doubled; what is happening in front of the screen is another event, one produced by the televised event which takes place elsewhere. Thus, the television broadcast is composed of two interconnected events occurring in at least two places: the actual place of the broadcast

and the place where it is viewed.

Another point that I would like to underline as a backdrop for defining the field is that representation entails another level of spatiality. There is a gap between the representation and the material organisation of space, which is nevertheless ‘naturalized out of everyday awareness’ (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004: 5). With reference to Debord’s statement that ‘the spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification’ (1983: paras. 2-3), Couldry and McCarthy point out how media claims a generalised and totalised view of society, in contradiction to its spatially limited coverage. Thus, this gap is politically informed and power-laden, and should be handled, as Couldry and McCarthy suggest, through ‘a geographically informed and spatially sensitive analysis of media artefacts, discourses, and practices’ which ‘reveals forms of inequality and dominance, knowledge and practice that are hidden from other analytical techniques’, and which changes the focus from an ‘infinite space of narrative’ (2004: 4) to the specific and material organisation of the space. From this viewpoint, I argue that a focus on the production space as part of a longer, extended and complicated process enables the researcher to go beyond an analysis of the text and its reception, as if television is a de-spatial, ‘virtual’ source for an endless flow of narratives, images and sounds devoid of any material conditions and relations of production.

Thus, while confining the field of my study to *the production space of the marriage show*, I acknowledge that it is a multi-layered space which is difficult to define and confine. This is only a partial view of a larger, multi-layered and complicated production, participation and viewing processes of a particular television show. I here acknowledge Clifford’s (1986) and Agar’s (1996) pointing to fieldwork as being inevitably *partial*. Reflecting on the different levels of *truth* that can be attributed to ethnography, Clifford reminds us that ethnographic writing is a creative process of *making* truths, which are

partial. He refers to the power-laden nature of this partiality: the selected narratives from the field are about making up the *truth* of what one is looking for. Agar (1996) stresses that ethnography itself is partial, being about a selected and limited time span with access to partial routes, networks, materials and practices. I recognise this partiality in both senses in my study. Constructing the field and constructing what is countable as data is a subjective process of selecting and producing a particular knowledge about the object of study. In my own study, I select one slice of a network of people, their practices, movements and narratives that produces/is produced by a television show. In the following sections, I will dwell on the process of research as a subjective and self-reflexive pathway for constructing a single account of the TV show *Esra Erol'da Evlen Benimle*.

The television studio is one (and a central) port of the marriage show at the intersection of two flows: the flow of the media text, and the flow of the humans who are moved *into* the media text. The show starts from the studio and is dispersed over the imaginary space of the nation-state through the domestic broadcast network ATV, reaching a Turkish-speaking global audience through satellite networks and the Web. Those who receive the show, in their turn, call and participate in the show, and may follow established pathways in order to participate the show. They call the show, come to Istanbul, to the Yenibosna Studios of ATV and take part in the processes of selection and preparation with the expectation of a happy ending – i.e. marrying – on the marriage show stage. Within this framework, the field of this study is the marriage show studio, which is confined to the places I could access, the pathways I followed, and the people I encountered through my movements in the studio, within a limited time span.

My focus on the production space has been significant for seeing how the production process includes temporal and spatial frames that shape people's movement across space, and their participation into the show. Throughout my research, I observed

how the candidates', audiences', visitors' and the researcher's entry into the production space is shaped according to the requirements of the televisual broadcast and conventions of the format, quite contrary to television's *uninhibited* intervention into audiences' everyday lives and intimate and social relationships, as Skeggs and Wood (2012) observe in their audience research. Thus, my focus on participation largely involves the candidates' real material experience within the studio, which is another level of intervention by television into their everyday lives, while their intervention into the show's flow is sought to be controlled through technologies and techniques of production, and by broader social norms incorporated into the selection and preparation process, as I maintain in Chapters 6 and 7.

Thus, the research boundaries of my field roughly correspond to its physical boundaries, i.e. the frames that the candidates and the audiences have to pass through before going to the marriage show's stage. Therefore, to locate myself within the research environment, it is necessary to describe the route and space of the research. I would like to note here that going to the field was, first of all, leaving London, where I have been living as a PhD student, and going to my home city Istanbul, where I had not lived for four years at the time of fieldwork. It may sound like I was quite familiar with the space surrounding the marriage show. On the other hand, familiarity and strangeness are forms of relation which acquire new intensities through encounter. During my trips to negotiate access to the field, I came up with new definitions of familiarity and strangeness within which I tried to locate myself and other subjects.

I drove from Üsküdar, which is one of the oldest districts of Istanbul and where I lived in Istanbul 4 years ago, to a completely unfamiliar district, namely Yenibosna, which is one of the newly developed industrial districts located on the European side. The drive generally took at least 45 minutes – up to 2 hours in rush hour traffic. I crossed two bridges, one of them over the Bosphorus – one of two connections at the time between

the Asian and European sides of the city – and the other over the Golden Horn, which passes through the old city of (Ottoman) Istanbul and sends me to Yenibosna. The drive allowed me a panoramic passage through all historical, modern, industrial, residential, affluent and poor districts of the city. Istanbul is the capital of the media industry in Turkey, in addition to being the biggest city, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire, and the most visited city by people around the world. Almost all of the national TV networks are located in Istanbul, spread around the new industrial developments I pass through to reach ATV Yenibosna Studios. Thus, it was during my long drives that I first started to think of Istanbul as the location of my field study: the city I know, which is home, turned into a city of strangeness because of the local differences, as well as my (changed) focus on the social and geographical characteristics of the place where I conduct fieldwork.

The Yenibosna studio is located at the crossroads of the biggest highways, very close to the biggest airport, as well as to the main coach station (Esenler). Thus, the geographical location of the studio makes it a port at the centre of the highways, skyways, and local routes people follow. Interestingly enough, the texture of Yenibosna can partly be described as an iconography of wedding and marriage. There is a big gold market called *Wedding World* just near the studio. It is crucial to note that gold is an important material for wedding ceremonies in Turkey, being the prevailing gift that the groom's and bride's family, relatives and friends present to the new couple. Thus, *Wedding World Shopping Centre* belongs to the economic network of the marriage market, as well as having iconographic value for wedding ceremonies in Turkey.

The iconography of marriage in Yenibosna is completed with the big residential area called *İhlas Yuva Sitesi* (İhlas Nest Housing Complex), located just behind the studio building. The housing complex is an iconic example of Turkey's new housing developments, which go back to the 1980s and reached their peak after 2003 through the

AK Parti's collective housing initiatives known as TOKİ (Toplu Konut İdaresi/Housing Development Administration) projects in public. *İhlas Yuva* is basically a huge complex of small houses that are suitable for middle-/lower-middle-class nuclear families, like a 'bird's nest'. It is also significant to note here that *nest* is a very common metaphor which refers to *home* – the house where the family lives together – and the phrase 'building a nest' is a common euphemism for getting married. Finally, the word 'to get married' in Turkish is *evlenmek*, which comes from the root *ev* (house/home): getting married is an activity of making/having a home – a *yuva* – together.

Thus, the coming together of these icons seems to indicate that there is a big market for weddings in Yenibosna: the bride and groom meet in the marriage show studio, their wedding ceremony takes place there, they can shop at Wedding World for the gold gifts, and what they need is a *yuva* – even a small flat in a big housing complex like *İhlas*.

The studio building is located just between İhlas Yuva Housing Complex and Wedding World Shopping Center. It is a prefabricated building which hosts three reality shows produced and broadcast by ATV: in addition to the marriage show, there is the crime show *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert* (Bittersweet with Müge Anlı) and also the globally franchised game show *Kim Milyoner Olmak İster* (Who Wants to be a Millionaire). Perhaps the television company prefers this building for reality shows as a separate place from the main network building: they need a larger space to meet the requirements of reality shows, i.e. to accommodate a large number of participants (audiences, guests, contestants, etc.) and all the staff. It is also difficult to control the use of the building by the large numbers of non-professionals associated with these types of shows.

All these geographical/locational aspects of the show directed my attention to people's *routes to* and *routines in* and around the marriage show. The process of participating in a reality show, the process of getting married, the process of getting married on television, all these different aspects of marriage show participation can be

conceived by looking at, first, what routes people follow to get to the program, and second, their routines within the studio building. In pursuit of these questions, this research took place in *the marriage show studio*, the very core of this spiral-horizon extending to the city, to the national borders, and at another level, to the global via television networks. The human flow of the show ends up at the studio building; every participant stops there for a while, some just once, others for weeks or months. It is also the technical core of the show, the location from which it is transmitted to home audiences.

The studio is a two-storey building with a large foyer area. All three reality show studios and the control room open onto the foyer downstairs; the production, call-centre, editing and meeting rooms, the host's room, and dressing rooms (changing, hairdressing and make-up rooms for female candidates) are upstairs. Only staff and female candidates accompanied by a staff member have access to the upstairs rooms. There, they are made up and prepare for the show away from male candidates, thereby nearly dividing the studio into two separate homosocial spaces. The male and female candidates only interact in public spaces within the building, like the foyer, and then only for short intervals.

Male and female candidates also have separate backstage waiting rooms. Three small rooms behind the stage are designated for the host, the female candidates, and the male candidates. All of the rooms open onto the stage from different doors. The male and female candidates never see each other before or during the broadcast, and the host doesn't see any candidates before they step onto the stage. I elaborate on the gendered organisation of the marriage show space in Chapter 6.

As part of the gender regime of the studio, I spent my time mostly in the female candidates' spaces. At a larger scale, the spatial organisation of the marriage show shaped my research routes and routines as well. I will elaborate on my own research route in the following section.

3.2 Research Methods

The first and foremost tool of the ethnographer, or as Agar (1996) puts it, the ‘diagnostic feature’ of ethnography, is participant observation. In his critical account of ethnography and the ethnographer’s position in the field, Agar puts an emphasis on the participation side of the task of participant observation, in contrast to classical anthropology, which highlights the *observation* side based on a hierarchical relationship between the observer and the observed. He advocates the position of the ethnographer who produces knowledge through *participation*, through encounters and collaborations with ‘the people with whom they work’ (1996: 16). As a result, he argues, the knowledge produced through research is not only the researcher’s account, but a collaborative project with her/his informants.

I would like to add that sometimes field research does not occur in the form of collaboration: The process of research, as I realised in the field, is not without tensions, ups and downs, confusion and conflicts between the researcher and the researched, which are informed by the wider social context, that produce positions for these two sides of the research encounter. I will bring forward an example from the field, to clarify my point. Ahu, one of the senior staff coordinating the candidates, and I were talking about the staff job descriptions one day. When I saw the job title *kurgu yönetmeni* (editing director/editor), I asked what this position was for exactly. Ahu’s answer was informative, but with a little defensive tone: ‘*It is not the way you understand from kurgu: he just puts together the footage and teasers*’. ‘*Ok, I get it*’, I said, ‘*Indeed this is close to what I understand from the word kurgu. It is similar to film editing*’. ‘*No*’, she insisted, ‘*It is not the way you understand. It is not similar to film editing. His job is just compiling footage, not producing fictions, like films*’. I understood that she was trying to avoid a possible misunderstanding that I may have based on a biased view of the marriage show. Ahu was trying to convince me of the *reality* of the reality show: everything was real in the show,

so nobody was producing fictions. At that moment, I gave up trying to articulate what I understand from *kurgu*.

My conversation with Ahu can be better understood if we take into account that there is one Turkish word that is used in place of two English words: both *editing* and *fiction* are translated as *kurgu* in Turkish. It is interesting that as a (new) Turkish word,¹⁶ *kurgu* uncovers the fact that every work of editing is also a work of fiction. I agree with Clifford's (1986) pointing to ethnographies as fictions, since ethnographic work involves partiality/selection. Producing teasers and usable footage from a huge quantity of raw footage and producing an ethnographic narrative from a similar quantity of notes, recordings, etc. are similar tasks. However, I did not insist on explaining my understanding of *kurgu*, since her concern was not to teach me the correct meaning. In fact, she was one of the members of staff who was most insistent on the show's realness. I observed that the production staff's wariness of the constant accusations that their show was a fiction contributed to their willingness to approve my request to conduct research on the set.

My encounter with Ahu revealed my position in the field, as a researcher. My work was taken seriously, and I was allowed anywhere in the studio building in service of one thing: observing and testifying that the show is *real*. Comments from several other staff members confirmed this observation about my role. Pelin, the program coordinator, half-jokingly told me: '*You see that we allowed you access everywhere and to talk to everyone here. Tell them the truth: tell them that we are serious here, there is nothing fake*'.

Scrutiny of the realness of the show, and the staff's and marriage candidates' responses to this scrutiny, is one of the main issues I grappled with throughout this dissertation, both in relation to the wider social/historical context in which the show is

¹⁶ Although I do not have any reference to prove my point, I suppose that the word *kurgu* is a new Turkish word created after the entrance of film and television technology to Turkey.

produced, and in relation to other questions I grappled with throughout the research, which mainly related to the production of the format through normative processes of framing.

Here, I would like to extend Agar's concept of *collaboration* by adding *encounter*, in the sense Sara Ahmed (2000) uses it. In her account of encounter, Ahmed points to a productive process of meeting, which produces the human subject encountering other subjects. The encounters of the researcher and the informant construct them as subjects of the fieldwork itself. Moreover, this encounter is not an individual encounter, but one that is constructed, enabled and informed by preceding historical encounters:

I want to consider how the particular encounter both informs and is informed by the general: encounters between embodied subjects always hesitate between the domain of the particular – the face to face of this encounter – and the general – the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism. The particular encounter hence always carries traces of those broader relationships. Differences, as markers of power are not determined in the 'space' of the particular or the general, but in the determination of their historical relation (a determination that is never final or complete, as it involves strange encounters) (Ahmed 2000: 9).

As such, ethnography is a form of encounter which informs and is informed by broader historical encounters, as well as by the very history of ethnographic encounter itself. As an *insider* researcher, who was born and has been living in Turkey except for a few years of study abroad, and who is nevertheless coming from the outside (from the historical outside of *national boundaries* – a Western context) and as a student coming from the context of academia to the context of television production, as well as one coming from the feminist movement, I also bring my baggage to fieldwork encounters. Throughout this dissertation, I aimed to reveal how my subjectivity was invested in my encounters with other subjects, which was also shaped over the course of the research and writing process.

I would like to describe how I handled my research process through encounters. I will mention two forms of encounter that help me to tell my own narrative of the ethnography: crossing the boundaries and establishing bonds.

3.2.1 Entering the Field: Crossing Boundaries

It was 19 September 2011, the first broadcast day of the new season. I already had consent and clearance from the ATV network to enter the studio, as well as indirect consent from the host, Esra Erol, via Facebook. Before my first visit, I sent a message to the staff via the program's Facebook page. They were very welcoming, and told me I could come to the studio whenever I wanted. My first encounters were quite promising in terms of access.

However, it was not so easy to pass the security control: at the entrance there were some prospective audience members waiting to be let in, but since it was the first day of the season and the studio was overloaded, they were not initially allowed to enter the building. I was also waiting in front of the studio. I named the people with whom I had been in contact and tried to explain why I was there, but the security staff said they could not allow me in if I could not call somebody from inside. Unfortunately, no one was picking up their phone, perhaps because they were all too busy with preparations for the premier broadcast. I think it was one of the most insecure moments of the research process.

After 45 minutes of waiting, for no particular reason, the security staff decided to let me in. It was my first experience with the lack of formality of access: I was allowed into the research site based on a spur-of-the-moment decision made by a staff member. This was one of many examples of what Rayna Rapp (2000) describes as 'serendipitous' access in the field: sometimes the informants called me to the very site that I wanted to get access to or *they* wanted to interview *me*, or sometimes the host called me to participate one thing or another. At first, I did not dare to open some of the doors in the

studio building, but these might be serendipitously opened as I was pacing back and forth in front of them.

Nevertheless, the main entrance to the building was not opened to everybody who waited in front of the building for a long time. On the contrary, it was reminiscent of airport passport control. The building was protected, and the entrance was controlled with metal detectors. Security also asked for and recorded the numbers from the national ID cards of those who wished to enter. During my subsequent visits, I saw that this was not only the case at the main entrance; almost all doors in and around the studio building – even some of the toilets – required access authorisation. This is why during the first stage of field research, it was the *boundaries* which separated some people from others – and which separated me from my potential informants – that caught my attention.

Because of my early observations about security and boundaries, I felt that I needed to keep silent and stay almost invisible in order not to lose the consent of the producers. My first encounters in the field were characterised by this avoidance of confrontation: I was concerned about violating rules and not sure what those rules were; e.g. whether I could disturb staff while they worked, how not to pass through the frame/boundary of the stage so that I did not appear on screen uninvited during a live broadcast, which questions could I ask my informants without endangering the rapport between us, etc. Crapanzano's description of the ethnographer sums up how I felt: 'a little like Hermes: a messenger who, given methodologies for uncovering the masked, the latent, the unconscious, may even obtain his message through stealth' (Crapanzano 1986: 51). Feeling like I was wandering almost invisible in the studio, control over human mobility and access made me feel as if I were stealing something to turn into a body of knowledge about the marriage show. I was feeling my existence as an excess in the field.

However, I was not still aware that this initial process of wandering and stealth would open up a place for me in this building and among these participants in the

television show. I gradually saw that I was not that invisible at all, and was surprised to learn that all my careful wanderings in the studio were well received by most of the staff (as if my efforts to be invisible were a form of communication), which boosted my self-confidence about being a researcher in the marriage show studio. My place and position as a researcher enabled me to crosscut the frames of the studio to some extent in the subsequent stages of my research. As I maintain in Chapter 6, every frame had its own conventions/rules/norms to be crossed by anybody in the building. I needed authorisation, which requires *collaboration* with the staff (for example to get access to some of the rooms).

I also realised that some boundaries/frames were non-accessible to me: These were boundaries not to be crossed but to be observed and conceived as *rich points*, to borrow from Agar (1996). The ultimate boundary was the frame of the stage; this was the area most strictly controlled by security staff, and by background staff in charge of gradually ushering the candidates to their places on stage, as well as by camera movements and by the director's shot selection. I realised that all these technologies of production and representation, as well as the strategies for positioning people in the studio, were constructing the core of the field: the stage. The crossroads between the backstage area and the stage itself was a rich point that needed to be understood in order to address my initial research questions in the field.

Observing the boundaries and the control of the human flow in the studio, I determined several 'safe' places for myself, which constituted the initial *research sites*. These were: the edge of the stage (I positioned myself near the cameramen), backstage with the female candidates and the foyer/lounge. The foyer was the only open access place in the building. I could watch the show from my place near the cameramen, though I spent most of my time in the field backstage with the female candidates. This was due to my interest in observing the backstage goings on, particularly in the moments before

candidates go on stage. Since this period of waiting also gave me time to interview candidates, backstage was the most convenient environment for my purposes.

It is crucial that, as much as producing knowledge about the show, I used interviewing as a way to form relationships with them. As I observed, from the beginning staff were mostly friendly, but it was after doing the interviews and formally presenting detailed information about my study that I had the confidence to ask for access to other sites, and new spaces were gradually opened to me. The dressing rooms for female candidates (make-up, hair, etc.), the call centre (where they field phone calls from home audience members and prospective candidates), and finally Esra Erol's dressing room were on the upper floor, which was accessed through an automatic door opened only to authorised personnel with an access card. Those sites were opened to me after a few months, especially after Gönül, one of the staff, and I developed a friendship. She became my key informant over my long stays in the female candidates' backstage area.

42 interviews were conducted with candidates and suitors. As much as being tools for knowledge production and developing collaborations with staff, the interviews were part of the general picture in the marriage show studio. It was not only me who was conducting interviews there. The marriage candidates were also interviewed by the members of staff at different moments: first on the telephone, then face-to-face in the studio building, later on stage by the host, and by the suitors she/he meets on stage. Since interviews were such an integral part of the communication in the space of the marriage show studio, it was not so difficult to get consent from informants for an interview. Moreover, in the midst of these processes, my interviews became additional moments where the candidates could pause and reframe their stories/retell the stories they had framed as their autobiographies. Sometimes they explained to me their decision to appear on television, or their thoughts about a potential partner after meeting on stage or after dating. They asked my opinion about the show, they talked about themselves and asked

questions like ‘*is it appropriate to appear on television for marriage?*’, etc. After seeing that my methods became part of the daily routine for the candidates, I realised that fieldwork is an exchange between the researcher and the informant. Thus, the collaboration was not one way, but reciprocal.

There was another boundary that I could not easily pass through, and which shaped the content of my dissertation. I spent a lot of time observing the female candidates’ backstage area, but this was not the case for the male side. This was largely due to the homosocial organisation of the space in the studio. The space was divided into two, not to allow female and male candidates to see each other before the broadcast. This made access to male spaces difficult. I was not forbidden to go and sit in male candidates’ backstage area, and I conducted a few interviews with male candidates, but I felt frustrated whenever I passed that room – more so than any other room in the studio. Noting the analytical significance of this gendered division of space in the marriage show studio, I arranged for one of my (male) friends, Alperen, to accompany me for two days and conduct interviews with male candidates, as well as to take observational notes for an additional three days; after our visits, we discussed and recorded our experiences and encounters.

Having said that, I did not re-visit the interviews with the male candidates when writing up the dissertation, although I several times read the notes and interview transcriptions, and listened to the recorded discussions between Alperen and me. His insight and observations contributed to the development of the main arguments, but the data he produced with male candidates remained silent in my writing. There are two reasons for this: First, as much as this exercise highlighted frames and boundaries in my research site, I also wanted to retain them as part of the research experience as an ethnographer. I was closer to the female subjects, and taking the routes they follow, participating in their preparatory activities, sharing the places they inhabit during the

show, listening to their comments, reflections, revelations about the show and their own lives, answering their questions about my life, my children, my marriage, supporting their wishes for their future marriages, our conversations sometimes brought us to tears together just before a bride's own wedding ceremony was about to take place on stage. Thus, I wanted to produce an account of the marriage show from women's perspectives and across women's movements in the studio. The gendered space of the marriage show also gendered my research pathway, and the writing process as well.

As already noted, the relationship and exchange between the researcher and informant is not always collaborative. Interestingly enough, just like some sites in the studio building were restricted for security reasons – including to me, the audience area also remained unexpectedly semi-closed to me. This was because their mobility was highly restricted before, during and after the show, so I had only brief spans of time to interact with them, for example during commercial breaks or just before the show. In addition, the audience coordinator was the only person who declined to be interviewed by me on tape, and who was the most suspicious of my study. I conducted 10 short interviews with audience members in the course of fieldwork, which was partly due to this sense of suspicion and partly the result of my focus on the candidates and the suitors, and hence my long stays backstage rather than among the audiences.

3.2.2 *Immersion: Establishing Bonds*

In her article on emotional encounters in the research process, Lewis remarks on a certain kind of secrecy at play over the course of data collection, selection and analysis, which makes the researcher avoid affectivity as a crucial layer of the research encounter, which would otherwise illuminate how the research process is informed by a larger framework – by other/previous encounters and the wider social/organisational context. I acknowledge her argument that 'encountering powerful emotional experiences is an occupational hazard of the social and human researchers' trade' (Lewis 2010: 221). In this

section, I will trace how my research process involved affective encounters that complicate the boundaries and frames that I have defined and maintained throughout the research.

Even at the moment when I felt ‘I am done with the fieldwork’, which was at the end of the broadcast season (June, 2012), I was not feeling totally immersed in the field. I never felt that my presence had become naturalised, even if I had gained access to almost all rooms in the studio, developed friendships, and even once heard from Esra Erol that she considered me as a member of staff – an assessment seemingly affirmed by some of the participants, as when women approached me for advice on their participation, or to assert their complaints about the show to me during our interviews, even if I explained my purpose in advance, etc. Throughout the research, I scrutinised the common immersion stories in classical anthropological works that convince us – the readers – about the ethnographers’ authority and authorship at once. I strongly felt the fragility of the ethnographers’ position in the field, which is based on a tentative agreement between various subjects of the fieldwork.

On the other hand, through an encounter with Esra Erol which took place at the end of December 2012, I realised that as much as *boundaries*, there were also *bonds* constructed through fieldwork, that go beyond the questions that I *prefer* to ask, the research pathway that I *choose* to take, and the data that I *frame*. I realised that although my fieldwork did not afford me access to people’s daily routines, the process was not about *my* collaborations with the informants, and *my* boundary crossings at the moments of encounter, but also their interventions into my own research pathway and writing activities that made it difficult to quit whenever I wanted. In the following section, I will make it clear how the research process involved establishing bonds as much as crossing the boundaries.

Esra Erol, the show’s host, called me 6 months after I had stopped making field

visits. We had not spent much time together during the fieldwork. Indeed she was almost invisible in the production space: her backstage room was separate, and she stayed there for all her preparatory work, so I was surprised and puzzled when she tweeted and texted me one night, saying that she wanted to talk to me if I was awake. I immediately called her back. We chatted about our kids for a few minutes, and then she came to the point: she *kindly* asked me to write an epilogue to her new book on the selected stories of thirteen women who had come on the show. The women, whose life stories were tragic, had volunteered for inclusion in the book: they had all been forced to marry when they were a child, and victims of rape and sexual violence. In very basic terms, the book was planned to be about the dark side of marriage, written by the host of a marriage show.¹⁷

What was this? Was she expecting a favour from me? How could I say ‘no’ to one of my informants – one at the top of the hierarchy among them who had consented for me to conduct research all over the studio – when she came to me with this unexpected act of generosity? On the other hand, how could I say ‘yes’ to such a request as a researcher? Was it going to cause a conflict of interest, a violation of the *code of conduct* that I had observed during my fieldwork? I was really confused. Her request to do her a favour was a favour to me as well, though it was also a new dilemma to be resolved.

First I kindly thanked her, noted that I had to take the advice and consent of my supervisors, and learn whether it would constitute an ethical violation to the university. These were sincere concerns, but I was also trying to buy time to think.

The day after, I visited the television studio. She was waiting for me to make her convincing speech: ‘*It is only you who can write this: you are the one who knows everything like one of us!*’ I was not quite sure what she was thinking that I knew, but at least she acknowledged that she thought of me as one of them, which assuaged the feelings of insecurity I had been feeling throughout my research. It was a remark of trust:

¹⁷ The book is titled *Sessiz Kadınlar* (Women without Voices), and was released on 6 February 2013.

I was one of them. This was very significant for a researcher, which she might have been aware of. On the other hand, this was a compelling move as well: she wanted to guarantee my contribution in the book. Indeed, as I maintain throughout the dissertation, her strategy was quite similar to the show's strategies to elicit the trust of the candidates and to convince them to participate in the show.

I felt as if I were walking a tightrope. I think it was one of the most difficult moments of my fieldwork. Before my decision, I took the advice of my supervisors, as well as my friends. Some of my friends found the situation hilarious, some were also concerned about research ethics, while others expressed that they thought it was a good opportunity from a feminist perspective: I had the chance to write for a popular book about violence against women, and I could frame the stories within a feminist perspective. When I wrote my supervisors about the dilemma, they advised me to find a stance that would not jeopardise my (critical) distance from the field, which would not break confidentiality, and which would enable me to use my background as a feminist researcher. I was quite relieved and motivated to contribute to the book after their advice. Thus, the bond I established in the field extended not only to my writing practice, but also to a network of feminist friends and members of academia.

The writing process was not so easy: I confronted several dilemmas while writing with the support of my friends from academia. Indeed I needed their confirmation and comments to overcome those dilemmas. I was happy to be accepted as an insider, but I did not want to lose my critical objectivity. To write for this book would be to endorse it, and to endorse the work of Esra Erol more generally, so I had to be very careful in my statements about her work. On the other hand, I was also critical of the pejorative comments about these programs and Esra Erol especially by an intellectual network that I am familiar with in Turkey, so it was also important for me to contribute to this book.

Besides, I wanted to be sure that what I wrote bore a feminist discourse: to be both

inspirational and informative for readers of the book. Still, I did not want to be didactic: in the end it was me who was learning from the stories of women. Struggling to find a place between being didactic and embracing the book, I submitted three short essays to frame the life stories of thirteen women as narrativised by Esra Erol.

Indeed this process of finding my way through this dilemma was revealing; the factors I grappled with, including bearing a feminist discourse while talking with Esra Erol and the thirteen women who told their stories for the book, not being didactic, keeping my analytical distance, etc. is representative of my fieldwork venture as a whole. This story can be read as part of my changing positions between being an insider and an outsider as the research process progressed from my first trips to the studio to the field, to the encounters around Esra Erol's book.

Thus, I tried to look at the everyday routines of subjects of the reality show through frames and crossings of those frames, just like I was crossing boundaries and establishing bonds in the field as a researcher. I tried to read and write the process of crossing the frames of the subjects of the reality show as a through my own venture, which, as I shared in the previous section was characterised by an initial shyness and almost invisible wanderings around the field, all the way through my eventual co-authoring work for Esra Erol's book. From this point of view, I would like to reconsider Grindstaff's observation:

One of my most surprising discoveries was that, in many ways, fieldwork mirrors the methods of talk-show production: while producers transform real-life experiences into entertainment, ethnographers transform them into research. Both attend to the ordinary details of everyday life, emphasize personal experience as a source of knowledge, and take real people as data while still framing the account with an "expert" voice. Sociologists and talk-show producers share the additional tendency to "study down," that is, target people with less power or privilege. (2002: 41-42)

I extend this argument to the genre of the reality show in general: television

ethnography is a parallel experience to a reality show production process. I also extend the notion of the mirror to that of the encounter: The ethnography of a reality show simultaneously involves encounters with participants in the reality show and participants in an ethnography, which construct the researcher, the audiences, the guests (marriage candidates in my case), and the production staff throughout a double process of creating a show and creating an ethnography of the show. It is necessary to recall that this ethnography has *partial* access to the es of the show, just like the television show has *partial* access to the everyday reality of human subjects. The following part of the thesis (Chapters 4 and 5), where I trace the candidates' narratives on their decisions to come to the show, constitutes the starting point of the route of my research pathway, as well as the route of the candidates' participation in the show.

***PART -2- MOVING TOWARDS
MARRIAGE/ THE MARRIAGE SHOW***

CHAPTER 4: TRUST

I was upstairs, in an empty room near the changing rooms, writing some field notes. A woman entered the room, and asked a question about the show. 'I am not a staff member', I replied. She then asked whether I was a candidate or not. I explained her that I am a researcher. She got excited. 'I need to talk to you' she said. I was astonished: why was she in need of talking to me? Then the story came out: She had finally decided today to come to the studio, after a year of thinking and staff trying to convince this very reluctant candidate to participate in the show: 'They occasionally call me, and I tell them I will come, I mean, I am coming. Then I change my mind, they call again and ask why I didn't come, do you see?' She also said that indeed, several times she had come to the studio building, but in none of her previous visits had she decided to venture on stage. She still seemed very hesitant, and asked my opinion about the show. 'I don't think it's right to influence your decision', I replied, 'but may I ask you some questions?' Sevil agreed.

The marriage show is an outcome of different levels of expectation and concern for different subjects who collaboratively produce it. What is of daily concern for the staff is managing the live broadcast while for the candidates it is the possibility of building a new life. Given that the format is based on marriage, one can conceive that the candidates' concerns about the possibility of success or failure to build that new life begin from the very moment they decide to come to the show. Their movements into the flow of the marriage show entail complicated processes of decisions, negotiations and struggles with their family members, friends, or anybody in their lives who would be affected by their decisions. As a mother of two young people in their twenties, Sevil told me how she negotiated with her children: 'My daughter supported me indeed, but my son', she stopped for a few seconds before continuing, 'it is difficult to be the mother of a son, you know'.

I knew to some extent that she was talking about the difficulty of deciding to get married a second time for women compared to men in Turkey, which makes the decision to come to the marriage show more difficult. She also added that ‘one also thinks about what other people – I mean the neighbours or relatives – will say. Not an easy decision. Never easy’.

Sevil’s account also demonstrates how her decision was not only based on her negotiations with her family, but also with herself. She described her reluctance to appear on stage as follows: *‘Just look at me, how many times have I come here and gone back, and come again. I see the set and ask, oh my God, what am I doing here? Is this the right thing? I ask myself so many questions’*. The questions she asks herself entail both her opinions and feelings about getting married again, including her and getting married on the show. Thus, the marriage show seems to be an uncanny place which is not easy to step into, as much as it is also a popular and desired venue for getting married. Then how do women decide to come to the show, and to step into the show’s flow in the first place? I seek to answer this question in this and the following chapter.

In general, when I asked the candidates about their decisions, or when they reflected on the show and their participation, the women cited complications and barriers similar to those of Sevil and narrated how they resolved them. Their decision-making processes have multiple registers regarding the show, regarding themselves, their lives, and other people in their lives. I dwell on those grounds respectively in the next two chapters by tracing the candidates’ assessments and narratives about their decisions to participate in the show. I would like to pursue my initial observation that the marriage show is registered as an uncanny place firstly because it is very much scrutinised by its audiences or those people who are familiar with the show on the basis of being an insecure environment for getting married. Second, as I maintain in Chapter 2, the show follows women’s discussion programs and other reality show formats, which open up a space for talking about the self, talking about the past, and about expectations, desires and fears

about the future, which had previously been outside the representational scheme of television, and as such could involve risks and dangers for the female candidates. One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that there are always limits to self-narration, which become apparent at every level of the production process (Chapters 5, 6, and 7). Within this framework, a new conventionality for talking about the self merges with a new conventionality for getting married, which makes the decision to come on the show difficult. On the other hand, the women I spoke to during my fieldwork had been convinced to come on the show in pursuit of their goal of getting married. I would like to grasp how they explain their decisions and subsequently move into the flow of the marriage show in order to find out how the marriage show is accepted and moreover embraced as a pathway to marriage.

I build my analysis on the accounts of six female candidates (Sevil, Nida, Ayla, Bahar, Gül and Melek), making Sevil's account the central focus. I have chosen my interviews with Sevil as a roadmap firstly because I had the chance to talk with her longer, and because her account largely covers the concerns and hesitations of other candidates. Moreover, and quite unlike some of the other candidates, she seemed more self-confident and positive about her life, which provided her with a way to talk about herself and her decisions coherently. Women do not always come to the show with ready-made self-narratives. These are usually teased out, framed and shaped with the help of staff at different stages of participation, as I analyse in detail in Chapters 6-7. It is crucial to note here that self-narration is not an easy form of expression for female subjects who are in pursuit of becoming proper subjects of marriage. Several studies on the making of the subjects of the nation in Turkey point to the limits of the life stories that are inherent to the dominant, state-orchestrated idea of proper subjecthood (Özyürek 2006; Sirman 2002). In her study on the contemporary life stories of Kemalist elites, Özyürek (2006) points out how elderly people who had witnessed and taken part in the establishment of

the new nation-state inscribed their life stories into the public history of the Republic. She states that these women were not the subjects of their own narratives, but rather witnesses of the public history of the Republic. The life stories in Özyürek's study can give us an idea about how it is difficult to tell a (proper) life story for those who did not have access to venues and forms to talk about themselves, and whose subjectivity is constituted on the basis of keeping the private life a secret. Even if, as I reviewed in Chapter 2, new forms of self-expression were available to the audiences and participants of new forms and genres from the 1990s onwards (talk shows, women's programs, reality shows and melodramas), the partiality of the narratives told to me can also be conceived as the tension between self-narration as a new televisual norm and the limits put on it within a wider social normativity.

I will re-visit my argument on the tension between being narrator or subject of narrative in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. What I would like to underline here is that it is possible this was because producing a coherent narrative of the self is quite a difficult task, one enabled over the course of preparation for the show, and since I was intervening in the middle of the candidates' narrative-making process (see Chapter 6), I could not always find such complete self-references and self-narratives. This may also be due to my methodology, as I depicted in Chapter 3 in detail. I limited my questions to their reflections, experiences and opinions about the show because of the short duration of interaction I had with individual candidates from episode to episode. Thus, in this part, I would like to share here one of the nearly complete accounts to use as a roadmap for later assessing other candidates' accounts of their decisions.

Another reason that I have chosen Sevil's account as a roadmap in my analysis is that she also chose me to accompany her on her decision-making journey, allowing me to witness part of this process first-hand. My relationship with Sevil, which she had initiated, was longer and more unstructured, and sometimes went unrecorded as well. She

was very anxious about the show, and asked my help to decide whether she should or should not go on stage. I tried to remain neutral about the show, not to affect her decision. It was much more like a conversation between two women who spontaneously came across each other and began chatting about marriage, divorce, motherhood and children, and about life in general. Nevertheless, the driving force of the conversation was her feelings and thoughts, fears and motivations about the show. Even if I tried to avoid commenting on the show, the conversation provided her with grounds to assess it and a kind of support in her process of making a decision. After our conversation, she went downstairs to the main studio to participate in the show. When I saw her waiting in the queue to go on stage, she said that I had played an important role in her decision-making process. Noting that I had tried to stay neutral while we were talking, our brief encounter was nevertheless important for both of us: I became a significant person for her as she made her way to the marriage show, and she became a significant informant in my research process. I had learnt so many things from her during our short acquaintance in the studio. By inviting me to join her on her journey, Sevil helped me to see the show from the candidates' perspective. It was after meeting her and being moved into the program flow with her that I started to pay attention to candidates' decisions. Later on, I accompanied her during preparation, during her footage shooting, through her meeting with a suitor and, finally, as she was trying to decide about him (she ultimately rejected him). Thus, I would like to acknowledge that our short acquaintance shaped my research trajectory (There is a detailed description of these processes in Chapters 6-7).

It is also crucial to note that not all candidates were as reluctant as Sevil. Indeed some of them were clamouring to get on stage, even trying to coerce the staff into putting them on, and exhibiting their disappointment if their turn did not come during that broadcast day. But it is when the reluctance is greater, as in the case of Sevil, that doubts and ambiguities become more visible.

Indeed, my conversations with Sevil, as well as other candidates, were full of bits and pieces of their biographies, with judgements, with desires and fears, which had the potential to open up several analytical pathways to make sense not only of the marriage show but also of marriage, family and subjectivity in general. In this chapter, I will focus on *trust* as one of the main registers that the female candidates engage in deciding about the show/narrating their moments of decision. I selected trust as the central focus, because it was one of the most common registers engaged in the decision-making process for a variety of candidates. Moreover, I pay special attention to candidates' references to trust first and foremost because Sevil's difficulty in deciding whether or not to participate signals that the trustworthiness of the marriage show is very often scrutinised. The show is usually discussed on the basis of its safety and trustworthiness. I do not remember how many times I heard from many people outside the flow of the show (my friends, family, as well as on social media) the argument that people cannot/should not trust those they meet on television. Indeed this argument was part of the scrutiny over the realness of the show (Chapters 1-2): Do people really trust in this show? How can they feel safe with a man who they met on the show? It may be the case that the register of trust which prevails in candidates' accounts is a form of speaking back to the scepticism and distrust towards the show, as well as to themselves for making the difficult decision to come on the show. However, I observe that there are multiple aspects of trust for different subjects of the marriage show. In the following sections, I aim to explore these from the candidates' side of the relationship. I will focus on how this works from the production end in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

4.1 Trust in Esra Erol

In our first conversation, after introducing ourselves, I moved on to asking Sevil my usual questions. The first question was about the very decision she was trying to make: 'How did you decide to come to the show?' It was no surprise to me that the first word to

trip off her tongue was *trust*. She said that she was convinced to come to the show because she trusted it. I asked what she meant by trust. She answered:

Trust, I mean I trust Esra. We know what she does, where she came from, where she goes. We watch her, we support her. I really mean that. She gives such a sense of trust. Trust is very important for me. I cannot trust everybody, I am a Taurus.

Sevil first and foremost puts her trust in Esra Erol. From her explanation, it is clear her trust has to do with familiarity; i.e. knowing Esra's background, the route she took on her way to becoming a beloved television personality. Here, I reference Sara Ahmed's account of recognising the familiar in the stranger (Ahmed 2000). According to Ahmed, the subject is constituted through her/his capacity to differentiate between others as familiars and strangers, and to calculate how and to what extent to get close to them. While stepping into a new place, a new community, a new routine, and among a number of new people (other candidates, program staff), Esra Erol stands out among them as being more familiar and less of a stranger, and thus *safe* to get closer to on a relative scale.

Like Sevil, many other candidates say too that they trust Esra Erol on the basis of feeling a sense of closeness of familiarity with her. It is crucial to note that, while talking about Esra Erol, they usually do not refer to her *position* as a reality show host, but rather to her personality. I never heard candidates referring to Esra Erol as 'the host', but by her first name 'Esra'.

In later parts of our conversation, Sevil asked me about other candidates' opinions of the show. I insisted that I did not want to influence her decision, but I could not keep myself from saying that that they, like herself, very often expressed their trust in Esra Erol. She cheerfully replied:

Yes, we trust her, don't we? Yes. Esra is like, how can I say, there is something spiritual, something related to God's mercifulness in her. Like talking [sincerely], there is an essence in her, we feel it.

So, by coming to the show, they get closer to Esra Erol, who they feel they know, who feels like a family member. As one of the other female candidates, Leyla, puts it: *‘Esra hanım (an honourific for women) is such a modest and unpretentious person. She is like my daughter. I always watch and admire her.’* Even if Leyla does not directly refer to Esra’s positionality, she highlights her modesty, which may be deemed unusual or contrary to her position as the host of a popular TV show. It is her personality, according to the candidates, which brings Esra close to them like a daughter, or in other cases as an elder or younger sister, rather than a distant and arrogant TV star.

Another candidate, Nida, who was quite critical of the show, stated that she had decided to come on because she trusts, and only trusts Esra Erol: *‘Let’s put the show aside, Esra Erol feels much more trustworthy than the show. I participated in the program solely relying on her.’* Nida’s comparison between the host and the show at large is noteworthy. During my visits to the studio and in my interviews with the candidates and staff, I also observed that Esra Erol’s personality elicits trust among subjects of the show. On the other hand, I would like to underline that they register Esra Erol as trustworthy sometimes by finding traces of familiarity in her story, and sometimes by finding some energy/spirituality in her, which can only be intuitively felt. Thus, their feelings for Esra Erol attract them to the show, and as they are attracted to the show, they maintain their feeling of trust toward its central figure, even though they will have the least contact with her during their participation. Esra Erol almost only sees the candidates on stage, while other staff are in charge of taking care of the candidates. The candidates’ *decision* to participate in the show is based on actualising their feelings of familiarity and intimacy with its most powerful subject. From this vantage point, trust in Esra Erol enables the candidates to move across the space of the show in the force of her glow, despite perhaps not always feeling the same about the staff members with whom they have more contact.

If the candidates do not see Esra Erol so often in the studio, what is it they find familiar during their participation? I will trace this question by having a look at what we the audience know about her. Firstly, ‘we’ know where she came from: a lower middle-class family in Kütahya, a small city in western Turkey. She is one of three daughters of a retired policeman. She started her career at a local television channel in Kütahya, and ultimately became one of the most famous daytime television hosts in Turkey. Thus, she has an *ordinary* background, which Sevil *recognises* as familiar (as an audience/participant in the marriage show). I argued in Chapter 2 that the commercialisation of the television industry in 1991 opened up pathways for people from diverse backgrounds and *ordinary* lives to come onto television screen. Esra herself made her way from Kütahya to Istanbul by these pathways: she found a job in one of the new, small-scale private television channels in Istanbul, which took her to the stages of larger-scale national TV channels and ultimately to a successful career. Indeed, this is a short account of Esra Erol’s past, which has been made available to me and other candidates through the broadcast over the years. What we know is that her ordinary life unfolds into an extraordinary success story as a talk show host. This is what Sevil and other candidates and audience members *know* and *support* about her.

In addition, *knowing* also implies a desire to be close to the life that Esra Erol lives/performs, which runs parallel to the show’s promises. In other words, Sevil trusts Esra not only because her life story extends from Kütahya to Istanbul and from ordinariness to fame, but also because it is a success story of marriage, as told and performed on the show. First of all, Esra married her fiancé on the show. As a happily married woman, she also announced her pregnancy on the show. After giving birth, she shared her feelings via a short video broadcast on the show. Indeed, whenever she talks about her everyday life, or she gives clues about her relationship with her husband and

her child; she is almost close enough to touch, as what she narrates to the audience is just an *ordinary* life.

I suggest that Esra Erol's ordinariness is an effect which results from the *form* of self-narrative employed, which gradually entered into televisual representation after the 1990s and during the 2000s (see Chapter 2), as well as from the *content* – what she encounters, lives, feels, etc. In her study on Oprah Winfrey, Eva Illouz dwells on the presentation of Oprah's autobiography in both the form and content of her show. Illouz suggests that, by narrating her autobiography on the air as a story beginning with *failure*, i.e. 'lack of self-esteem, sexual abuse, overweight', which she *successfully* overcame, Oprah has proven to her audiences that 'television can and does change lives' (2003: 38). This resonates well with Esra Erol's story, not only for becoming a success story for the audiences, but also for performing 'the ideal woman/wife/mother' on the stage: she almost proves that television can and does have the power to facilitate successful marriages. Thus, like Oprah, she becomes 'her own ideal typical guest' (Illouz, 2003: 38). However, there is also an important difference between Oprah and Esra Erol which mainly stems from the difference between the formats of the two shows. Oprah's format is based on narratives of *failure* that subvert 'the politics of secrecy that is fundamental to the middle-class nuclear family, the violent side of which Oprah experienced directly' (Illouz 2003: 26). In other words, as the basic form/ingredient of the format, Oprah narrates a success story at the expense of revealing the *secrets* of the (middle-class) family. On the contrary, Esra Erol, as the host of the marriage show, performs the proper subject of marriage and as a result, she does not violate the 'strong ideological separation between secrecy and exposure' (Illouz 2003: 26). As the ideal typical guest, she performs the ideal typical woman/spouse/mother, who will be a model for the candidates. Thus, there is no subplot of failure in her autobiographical account, not even a trace of dissatisfaction about her achievements, her familial relations, and her marriage. As such,

I suggest that Esra performs the *desirable* at a level of reachable, touchable closeness, which elicits trust. Audiences just need to take the pathway that the show opens up in order to get closer to Esra Erol – to get closer the possibility of a good marriage. As such, she is the proper subject *par excellence*, narrowing the gap between the represented and the real: she performs within the (normative) frames of the hegemonic scheme of representation, and her performance is so intimate, so ordinary, that her performance is registered as real.

Thus, it is apparent in candidate accounts that Esra Erol moves audiences into the flow of the show: she attracts their attention by merging the *ordinary* into the *normative* through her performance and autobiographical narrative. The proper marriageable subject comes to a reachable, touchable distance for ordinary people from a variety of places, classes and backgrounds. Thus, trust in Esra Erol at every level – her personality, her performance, her powerful position – is related to the wider social normativity entailing marriage and proper marriage subjecthood.

4.2 Trust in the Format

Another register of trust can be traced through the candidates' accounts of the show's format. Sevil identifies its procedures/production process as a source of trust. This time, she assesses the 'safety' of the show *en route* to marriage:

You can choose one among the suitors here. It is democratic, which is good. But it is also difficult to believe. He comes, then, what will come out about him? I have questions in mind, yes. However, it is the case for the outside as well, isn't it? It is much safer here, at least they have to show their national ID cards.

First of all, she compares the show with the *outside*: How is it different from conventional mating/matchmaking processes? She knows Esra Erol, she is called in front of the screen by the familiar, spiritual and modest sound of her voice. On the other hand, she neither knows the potential suitor, nor what she will encounter during the

matchmaking process on the show because it is an unconventional pathway to marriage. Indeed this was the question left unanswered in her mind as we talked even moments before the live broadcast. To resolve this, she cited the show's security processes, which I describe in detail in Chapter 6, saying that they do not allow people in without national ID cards. Although the information one can find on an ID card is limited – it neither proves one is not wanted by police, nor guarantees one is not married – her comment points to a need to feel safe.

Here I trace the oscillation between the registers of trust and safety in candidates' accounts. This is first of all because there is an etymological relationship between trust and safety in Turkish. They come from the same root: *güven* means trust and *güvenlik* means security/safety. Apart from their grammatical closeness, what brings these two registers closer in Sevil's speech is that both can be understood in relation to growing closer to/more familiar with strangers. One both needs to feel safe and to be able to trust a man she meets in the marriage show studio, whom she will spend time with outside of the studio and ultimately might marry. Once candidates step into the marriage show's flow, they seek new anchors for trust and safety in the milieu of a new pathway to marriage. Interestingly enough, the source of trust for Sevil is exactly what differentiates the show from the outside. In Chapter 6, I describe the security process as one among a variety of framing activities that marks the marriage show as a distinct space for mate selection and matchmaking.

Other aspects of the show are also cited as sources of trust in candidate accounts. Ayla's emphasis on publicity can be understood as a reference to a quality of the show which elicits trust:

This is er meydanı. I mean, one cannot keep secrets here. Those who're not ready to get married, those who left mistakes in their past cannot succeed on the show. Sometimes they do, they tell lies, but it is discovered soon.

Ayla points out that not everybody can dare to appear on a popular TV show, not if the life story is not appropriate to share in public. First, her commentary can be understood in relation to my argument that the marriage show makes it possible for personal stories to be told in public, something previously kept off televisions screens. On the other hand, her reference to publicity and candidates' pasts also demonstrates that there are always limits on the personal story, and that not all subjects and their life stories find their way to the screen. The show's publicity itself is the first and foremost limit on personal stories, and by extension a source of trust cited by candidates. I suggest that it is because television in Turkey still operates as the representational space where the represented is equated with the real, and the real with the proper, as I explained in Chapter 2, the publicity of the show constitutes the limit to the personal life story. Again, as I put it in Chapter 2, the marriage show (as a reality show format), complicates the gap between the represented and the real by opening up a space for articulating subjectivities. The publicity of the show elicits trust by actively re-drawing the limits to this space.

Thus, Ayla points to one of the most crucial characteristics of the show: it opens up a space for articulating subjectivities through personal life stories, and simultaneously limits this space through its format. Those who come to the show with the aim of getting married cannot get away with misrepresenting themselves or their pasts on camera. Neither can they simply hide the truth about themselves because of the show's participatory format. Those who know the candidate can easily call in and reveal the truth, which, according to Ayla, elicits trust towards the show.

I would like to note that Ayla uses the phrase *er meydanı* to point to the publicity of the show, which implies that there is a gender aspect to trust in the show's publicity. The phrase can be translated as 'a square of manhood', connoting that those who are accepted as blameless and courageous enough to come onto the show are men. I would

like to think of the show as being *er meydanı* through the words of Bahar, another female candidate:

Besides, I don't trust any of the men around me, because, sorry, but all of them are egocentric self-seekers. Therefore I decided that it is better to find someone from the marriage show.

She trusts the show *because* she does not trust men, so she thinks it is better to find a marriage partner with the help of the show. Although she does not address directly why a man found through the show would be a better potential husband, she uses publicity as her basis for trusting men she might meet through the show, unlike the men she knew in her life outside the studio. It is helpful here to provide background information about Bahar's story to clarify why she juxtaposes trust in the format with lack of trust in the men outside. She was a woman of 24 who had been forced to marry at the age of 16, and who was thrown out of the house by her husband after giving birth to her child five years ago (at the time of interview). She made such an impression on me as she told how she had been abandoned by both her own family and by her husband, about what she encountered during those five years, and how much she missed her son. At the time of interview, she was sharing the house of an elderly man whom she called '*my stand-in uncle*', and whom she had coincidentally met in another TV show's studio – the only man, as she said, whom she could trust in life.

Nevertheless, it is not only that women do not trust men because they are subject to *male violence* to varying degrees of intensity. What I would like to draw attention to here are the norms and conventions regarding family and marriage, which systematically put women in an insecure position. Even in a situation like Bahar's where her family, her husband, and others had conspired to exploit her, it can be difficult for women to find people to trust as she trusted the man whose home she shared. In a larger framework, though, it is this issue of security and breaking through the regimes of family secrecy

keeping their position insecure that is at stake when women cite the show's publicity. The differentiation between the show and the outside is remarkable not only in Bahar's story, but in various stories of women who seek public witness on the marriage show as a strategy for navigating women's structural insecurity. They want to marry in order to be safe in life, they want to marry through a safe pathway, and they want to find trustworthy mates. In conventional matchmaking procedures, secrecy is built up around the groom-to-be; here instead the women decide to trust that the marriage show will uncover for them about men, what might otherwise have remained hidden before the wedding.

The family as a regime of secrets, I suggest, enables men to enjoy the fruits of patriarchy, while women are put in an insecure position. What is the secrecy at play in conventional matchmaking processes then? And in relation to this question, what kinds of truths do women expect to be revealed on stage? Sirman's (2002, 2005) account of the family illuminates what is kept outside the hegemonic representations of family and marriage. Sirman states that it is not only adultery and violence, but also the prevailing norms of family and matchmaking such as arranged marriages, marriages to close relatives, and the organisation of life on the basis of kinship ties that form the secrets of the family that have to be kept outside the hegemonic representations of the family. I can add the religious contract as another secret, which is officially forbidden by the 1927 Civil Code but is still observed in some sectors as an alternative to the civil ceremony (Özyürek 2006). Religious marriages may be recognised by one's local community but are not recognised by the state. Thus, for example, male candidates may hide the fact that they are already married from the show's staff as they make their way to the stage, but these marriages may be uncovered when members of the viewing audience call in, whether or not the accurate marital status is displayed on his national ID card (see Chapter 6).¹⁸

¹⁸ A religious contract is basically the oral consent of the couple to get married under the witness of two people and an arbitrator. Although it is not compulsory for the arbitrator to be a religiously competent person, the contract usually takes place under supervision of an officially recognised Imam, or an admired religious community leader or a sheikh, or a respectable member of the family or a relative (for a detailed

I suggest that by keeping religious marriage outside of official procedures, the modern state enables men to retain polygamy, and to leave women without paying any economic, emotional, or social expenses in return because the religious contract is not legally binding, although it is viewed as valid in many communities. What is significant regarding my study is that the show intervenes in the gap between state regulation and hegemonic representations on one side, and marriage practices on the other side. It is crucial to note here that I do not argue that the show's publicity is capable of subverting the patterns and structures of secret and secrecy, but the female candidates expect, and what is more, ask the show to reveal these secrets in order to improve their position of insecurity within the existing family structure.

I would like to highlight another point about trust in the marriage show's format, which seems contradictory but is indeed complementary to the previous one. Female candidates told me that in addition to the secrets they would like to see revealed, the show's format also makes it possible to keep secret things they would prefer not to reveal, as Bahar's account of trust demonstrates:

I think it is much more sensible to marry here. They investigate everything. I said from the beginning that I have things that I don't want to tell, and they arranged everything accordingly.

After noting that the show investigates people's secrets, Bahar stated that she trusts the show because she believes she was able to negotiate which elements of her story she would or would not reveal with the staff backstage before the live broadcast (for the staff's

definition, see the *nikâh* article in Encyclopedia of Islam (Atar 2007). According to the civil code, a religious contract can be conducted only after a civil ceremony takes place, though this is not the case for a considerable number of marriages in Turkey. In addition, although polygamy is officially forbidden, it is not rare that a man may have more than one wife, all but one of them through religious contract only. According to the 'The Survey of Family Structure in Turkey', conducted by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011, a considerable majority of up to 93.7% of the population are married by both religious and civil contract, while 3.3% are married by only civil contract, and 3% are recorded as being married only by religious contract. Even if the ministry's survey does not provide a complete picture of marriage types in Turkey, first and foremost because it excludes and therefore does not measure polygamy, it is informative in terms of understanding the importance of the religious contract in Turkey (*Türkiye'de Aile Yapısı Araştırması 2011*).

accounts of these negotiations, see Chapter 6). Thus, the framing of her personal story for public consumption is a source of trust appreciated by candidates. Out of respect for Bahar's concerns I will also not discuss the parts of the story she shared with me confidentially. What is crucial here is that the show's trustworthiness to her gave her a sense of control over her participation, and thus the opportunity to use her appearance on the show to pursue a happy marriage on her own terms.

Indeed Bahar's remark about maintaining her privacy may be understood in relation to my own argument. The female candidates at once *entrust* their secrets to the marriage show, and *trust* the show that it will uncover what may potentially be hidden from them. I suggest that both aspects of trust which are made possible within this format and are subject to negotiation between the candidates, staff, host, and audiences. The candidates' stories, movements and encounters with other subjects are thereby framed in such a way as to allow some secrets in, while keeping others out. How the work of framing takes place on the show is handled in Part 3 (Chapters 6-8).

I would like to bring forward another woman's account of trust in the show, one which connects women's structural insecurity with public debates about the show and demonstrates how the show exceeds the confines of hegemonic representations of the family. As I pointed out above, the show bridges the gap between state regulation and hegemonic representations of the family on the one hand, and actual marriage practices and women's experiences within those social structures on the other. When they cite their sense of trust and safety in the show's format they are pointing to potential risks in conventional matchmaking processes. Gül's reflections on then-Vice Prime Minister Bülent Arınç's criticism of the marriage show speak to this:¹⁹

¹⁹ Bülent Arınç's declaration about the show's format: 'Excuse me but I want to vomit when I see those programs. They purport to bring about something good, but what they do is just find a few outcasts who are flipping from channel to channel. I feel pity for those foolish men and women.' (translated) 'Arınç: İzdivaç programlarını izlerken kusmak istiyorum' *Milliyet*, August 11, 2011. [online] Available from: www.milliyet.com.tr [accessed: 14.09.2014].

They stone the fruit tree. They attack Esra Erol. They say she undermines the morality of Turkey. However, it is more guaranteed here than outside. They investigate everybody in detail before allowing them in. Bülent Arınç says Turkey's morality is ruined. Why? Women and men are kept separate here. Even when one's marriage is arranged by the mother and father it may end in trouble.

Gül's account introduces to us another word which comes along with the register of trust. She uses the word 'guaranteed' for addressing the feeling of safety in the show.

I asked her to elaborate on what she meant with the term and she answered as follows:

You don't feel as guaranteed even in your house. I mean, there is security check here. Everything is perfect. They never mix men and women here. Everything is so natural and good. They're doing a difficult job here. It is never as seen from outside. They take care of [people] one by one. It's really a hard job; there are lots of employees. They work with a crowded staff. I say, May God grant all of us hayırlı kismet (good fortune).

She unpacks the word 'guaranteed' by addressing several processes that I pointed to above: the security check, the homosocial organisation of the space, and the care for the candidates backstage. First, like Ayla and Sevil, the show's security precautions make Gül feel secure enough to participate. She also compares the show with *the outside*, with a different emphasis: she states that the show is safer than home. Indeed it was one of the most striking moments in my research when I sensed the pattern emerging among my informants that they did not feel safe in their own homes. Second, she points to the homosocial organisation of the space, emphasising that unpredictable encounters backstage between men and women are prevented. These factors are the basis for Gül's sense of security during her participation in the show.

Gül emphasises another aspect of homosociality in the show and the fact that female and male candidates only meet on stage or otherwise in publicly witnessed environments. She juxtaposes her feeling of safety against the vice-prime minister's criticism, insisting that the show does not ruin morality in Turkey. She trusts that the show will not negatively

affect her honour and respectability. She thus places her trust in the show to uphold her own honour and respectability as a woman, as well as that of Turkey.

The characteristics of this format (the security checks, the publicity, the ability to negotiate one's level of comfort with sharing private information, the homosociality) elicit feelings of trust and security in the candidates. The female candidates I quoted here, as well as many others I talked to during my research, explained their decisions to come onto the show using all the reasons discussed in detail here that help them find someone to marry while retaining their respectability. In turn, they *expect* that the show will constitute them as proper subjects of marriage. To be clear, I am investigating the women's subjectivity here; it is not that the show makes claims to guarantee the safety and security of all its candidates, it is that the candidates feel secure enough in the format that they are comfortable opening up about their lives on camera. Another important aspect of these feelings of trust comes from the fact that the show is oriented towards women themselves, in a system of alliances connecting the state, the family and the men at a broader scale, which is related but not confined to the meanings, practices and representations of the family in Turkey. I will explain how candidates register themselves as trustworthy, honourable and respectable in the next section.

4.3 Trust in One's Self

As the final point of this chapter, I would like to elaborate on the feelings of trust which are articulated in relation to the candidates' own selves. Here, it is crucial to note that I do not refer to self-confidence/self-esteem, which may be deemed as psychological states which could surely be an object of analysis regarding marriage show candidates. Accounts of trust in one's self, on the other hand, are an endeavour to locate the self within the processes and procedures of the show and within wider social norms regarding the family, the nation, the state, and gender. Thus, these accounts point to the space opened up to the self within the show as a form of speaking about the self.

As I have tried to show in the sections above, candidates take the register of trust on in various and sometimes contradictory ways. So, for example, it may point to a similarity or difference between factors inside and outside of the show (conventional matchmaking processes vs. the conventions of the marriage show). Or it may work to distinguish Esra Erol from other subjects and procedures of the show, as in the case of Nida. Ultimately, this produces a loop – a vicious circle – when it comes to trust in one’s self: the show is trustworthy because its subjects are trustworthy, and vice versa. Thus, trust is a fragile agreement among different subjects of the show who want to make themselves and the show trustworthy because they seek a safe and trusted pathway to marriage, which is doubtlessly a difficult venture in a context where marriage itself may be a source of violence and disappointment, especially for women. Within this context, it is crucial to see that women also put trust in their own bodies, movements and narratives when they move through the uncanny routes of the marriage show and meet strangers with the aim of getting married. Here, Luhmann’s differentiation between confidence and trust is helpful for understanding how trust as a ‘solution for specific problems of risk’, in comparison with confidence, which is the presumption that life goes on its way, and that ‘your expectations will not be disappointed’ to the exclusion of other possibilities (Luhmann 2000: 97). According to Luhmann, trust is about making decisions while presupposing the risks of that particular situation:

If you do not consider alternatives (every morning you leave the house without a weapon!), you are in a situation of confidence. If you choose one action in preference to others in spite of the possibility of being disappointed by the action of others, you define the situation as one of trust (2000: 98).

Thus, according to Luhmann, trust entails a subjecthood which acts and moves within the world by foreseeing and calculating the risks. I do not assess the candidates’ feelings of trust on the basis of whether they calculated the risks of moving into the flow

of the show. As I stated, their accounts of trust are retrospective assessments and narrations of the moment of decision. This may or may not entail a forecast of risk. On the other hand, what Luhmann's argument on trust helps me to understand is that the account of trust entails an endeavour to locate one's self as a responsible, respectable, honourable subject on the path to marriage, and within the routine of the marriage show. Thus, a certain sense of selfhood is at play at the moment I ask them about their decisions. As such, the accounts of trust in one's self are part of the constitution of the subject in relation to the normativity of marriage and the marriage show, which sometimes collaborate, sometimes contradict to each other. I will clarify my point by addressing candidates' accounts of trust in the self.

First of all, as I quoted in the previous section, by saying '*You don't feel as guaranteed even in your house*', Gül marks the space/process of the marriage show as safe/guaranteed. I suggest that she also *marks* herself as a respectable/honourable woman by asserting that she is part of a human flow which is controlled homosocially, and she acts within the limits of *morality*. This is another form of gendering the space of the show, this time on the basis of honour, which is maintained by 'a desire for safe-keeping' (Sara Ahmed 2000), through which women control their own movements. As Ahmed states, 'movement becomes a subject constitution: where 'one' goes or does not go determines what one 'is', or where one is seen to be determines what one is seen to be' (2000: 33). In a similar manner, in her study on women's uses of city parks in Ankara, Alkan argues that being in places which are deemed *unsafe* also marks women who go there as dishonourable (Alkan 2014). Thus, for example, in rape trials in Turkey, even if the court agrees the woman has been raped, it still seeks to learn whether or not there was consent by looking at the conditions under which the rape occurred, i.e. whether she could have foreseen the possibility of rape (Demir-Gürsel 2014), as in the case of being someplace where she was more likely to be subject to violence. Thus, being in places known to be

dangerous/unsafe for women can be regarded not only as an *excuse* but also as *consent* for whatever they are exposed to in these places.

Female candidates' concern with marking themselves as respectable/honourable women acting in accordance with the norms that define where a woman should go or with whom a woman should appear becomes apparent in registers of trust in one's self. I will turn back to Sevil's account to clarify my point. As I quoted earlier, she expressed her hesitation about encountering strangers on the show despite noting that the show was not so different, and even more secure, than the outside. So, it was interesting to hear her reference her self-respect, which implies that appearing on stage is something *desirable* for her. It was when we were talking about her life, her struggles with her children, and her ending up in the marriage show studio that I acknowledged that she had succeeded in managing her life on her own. She answered, '*Yes, I succeeded. So I am blameless, I can even appear on television*'.

Interestingly enough, it is because she had succeeded in faultlessly performing the role of 'gentle lady, respectable housewife, and holy mother' (Saktanber, 1993: 216, translated), and so there were no obstacles of personal or family honour to stop her from presenting herself in the public forum of the marriage show. Her expression resembles Ayla's metaphor of *er meydanı*, only from a different perspective. That is, it is not only because she trusts that the production process of the show and others who go on stage are blameless; she also trusts that her own blameless reputation makes it possible to put herself under the public scrutiny of the stage. While she herself was not quite sure about participating in the show, and oscillated between trust and hesitation, she simultaneously conceptualised the show as a place to show off as a blameless person.

Thus, I argue that the candidates make/mark the space they enter, wander and inhabit as safe/secure and thus trusted, by marking themselves as trustworthy and

respectable women. At the same time, they *secure* their trustworthiness and respectability by marking the space/procedures of the show as secure and safe.

The accounts of trust in one's self are at the same time accounts of *risk* at various levels, i.e. regarding conventional matchmaking processes, regarding life at home, regarding the official discourses on morality and honour, and so on. The decision to go on the marriage show, by all accounts, is a quest for the best, most trustworthy, safe pathway to marriage possible. Indeed the decision to get married is also a question of trust, if we consider the critical stance of the candidates towards the structures, institutions and norms regarding marriage. Nevertheless, the show cannot draw a safe path, not because it is outside the conventional forms of matchmaking; on the contrary, because it is a show which is formulated within the normative limits of marriage and family. I suggest that this is also apparent in candidate accounts, that by constantly talking about how they trust the host and the format's procedures, they register the show as an uncanny space and route to marriage. This is best depicted in Melek's words:

F: How do you think people trust those they meet here?

M: Who can you trust in life, at all? What is the difference between someone you met here or on the street or in your school? Do you think that they are trustworthy? No, they're not. Or you can never know what life will bring. I gave birth to two children, I had a wonderful marriage, a wonderful job, then, what happened? I have nothing now. What can I trust? Nothing. [She stares upwards] He writes. He kicks, and you fall down. This is life. You can't trust people here. However, at least, as a woman, you can intuitively make a rational choice of a spouse. But if you just look at his appearance, or his wallet you can't make a good marriage. He would put you through the wringer then.

On the whole, what I would like to emphasise regarding the register of trust, which is addressed in almost all of the candidates' (and the staff's) accounts of the show, is not an objectively defined criterion that is oriented towards pre-determined objects. On the contrary, there is a loop of trust with no identifiable origin point.

I have tried to depict trust as a register which passes through different forms of speaking about one's self, other subjects, and other aspects of the show. None of these registers precede the others, so there is no real and single source of trust. Rather, it is through a coming together of these accounts that the show becomes a trusted venue/path to marriage, and people who meet each other in this venue are trusted – to some extent. That is, they trust those who are in the human flow of the show because if one is within the human circle of the studio, he/she has been deemed a trustworthy person since the format and the people who produce and implement it are deemed trustworthy. And as part of this loop, they trust the format and the staff because they trust themselves, because they are there, in the human flow of the show, as reliable/trustworthy people. This loop shows how trust is a register that signifies the motivation for the decision: the decision to move into the flow of the show, when everything (the conventions of the TV show), and everybody (candidates, staff members) are indeed unfamiliar to each other. Trust is a register that articulates desires and motivations about the show and about marriage when everything is ambiguous. In other words, it is one of the predominant speech forms (registers) that candidates take on in order to express their desire to get closer to a narrative of success (as in the case of trust in Esra Erol) and the motivation for producing a narrative of a self capable of taking a route to success and happiness (as in the case of trust in one's self) through a shared process/procedure (as in the case of trust in the format). (The other register is loneliness, which will be handled in next chapter).

In Chapter 6, I analyse in detail how the production staff deploy trust in accepting prospective candidates to the show, and in convincing people to come to the show, but the issue of trust prevails in both candidate and staff interviews. The staff say they first have to trust that the candidates accept the show; and second, they have to prove the show's trustworthiness in order to convince the candidates to come on the show. In addition, staff members have to trust the candidates to move with the rhythms of the

programmatic flow in order to prevent bad surprises during live broadcast. The staff's venture to use trust as a selection criterion resonates with the candidates' own engagement of trust as they move towards the program. In both cases, trust constructs the limits of proper subjecthood and the boundaries of the show at the same time. The narratives (the content of the show) and the narrators (the candidates) are selected for, framed into and recruited onto the show with a dynamic and tentative trust-based contract between subjects.

Nevertheless, how to forge a safe path to marriage through these manifold narratives, sensibilities, and trajectories in an atmosphere of flux is still an unanswered question. Subjects can travel around the loop of trust without an answer. While it makes a life story speakable, a suitor approachable, the host familiar, thus a subject *proper*, the trust agreement remains fragile. That is, candidates still stop by these encounters and assess and render that particular moment. During my short acquaintance with Sevil, I observed her reluctance in nearly all these moments. I accompanied her while she shot her footage, where she was much more hesitant to share her story than she had been with me: Is it right to tell this or that on stage; and more than this, do I feel good about telling this story? She asked my opinion about her dress just before going on stage: *'Do I look good enough to appear on television even after all that shopping?'* Finally, when a suitor approached her, she was really reluctant: *'He seems to be a good person to marry, but how can I have a life outside of the circle of the show? How can I trust him?'* Finally – I don't know why – Sevil decided not to marry him and left the show.

To be sure, there are many women who, unlike Sevil, end up marrying on the show. On the whole, part of the promise the show makes is that this loop of trust will not lead candidates to a dead end. Above all, what makes the show a trusted reality show format is that it promises marriage, and indeed a safe means to that end. As I maintained in Chapter 2, the marriage show is an outcome of the TV industry's search for a *safer* reality

show format after a series of killings and suicides in 2005 that were linked to women's talk shows and prompted heated public debate and the ultimate abandonment of talk show formats focused on 'airing dirty laundry'. Thus, the marriage show's success, measured by its high ratings and continued success after seven seasons (as of the 2014-2015 season), result from its call for subjects to narrate their stories, express their desires, and so on, to a socially acceptable and therefore safer end: to get married. Thus, the show becomes a venue where subjects *entrust* their lives by entrusting their time, their bodies, their movements, their life narratives, etc., while acknowledging the risks and dangers that restrict their movement both within and outside the show, and both within and outside of marriage.

4.4 Conclusion to Chapter 4

In this chapter, I traced the female candidates' reflections on the show on the basis of trust, keeping track of Sevil's arguments as a roadmap, but also drawing on other participants. I argued that Sevil and other candidates take on several registers in their decision-making processes. I specifically explored the register of trust, which is an assessment applied to the show and its producers, the host, the staff and those who they are going to meet in the space of the studio. It is both an expectation based on the program's procedures and a retrospective evaluation of the moment of their movement into the show. Trust is ultimately oriented to one's self as one among many subjects of the show: the candidates usually refer back to themselves as the source of trust in the format and towards the other subjects of the show they encounter. As such, the register of trust in candidate accounts points both to propriety (of the subject), and efforts to achieve propriety (i.e. a good marriage) using a safe pathway (the show).

In conclusion to the chapter, I would like to underline my argument that the show is in actuality not equipped to realise the promise of being a safe route to marriage, given other systematic alliances that leave women vulnerable. Here it is necessary to record the

killing of a 47-year-old woman by the 57-year-old man she met and married on the show (his third marriage after two divorces) in August 2014. Besides the tragic loss of life, the event triggered public criticism towards the marriage show: ‘This is what you expect if you trust someone you met on the show’; ‘How can Esra Erol take on the responsibility of marrying people on the show, given that three women per day are killed by men in Turkey?’, were two criticisms that circulated social media, discussion programs and feminist email groups.

It was a very insecure moment for me as well; I felt I had to re-think my argument on women’s trust in the show, as the killing occurred just as I began to draft this chapter. Besides reminding me that the show, far from being a safe space, is one node among myriad moments, processes, and procedures that are first and foremost dedicated to protecting the family at the expense of placing women in a vulnerable position. Within this framework, I argue that trust is an ultimate aim that points to a desire for propriety, a desire for harmony and happiness, and a concern with registering one’s self as sufficiently proper to deserve these. Thus, trust is about propriety for the marriage show’s subjects.

On the other hand, being unmarried and looking for a mate on the marriage show is itself a long way from the normative scheme of propriety, and is judged and degraded among the viewers of the show. If trust is about maintaining the safe limits of subjects’ movement towards marriage and the show, as well as simultaneously being about making them into marriageable subjects, there must also be another register which points to those aspects of subjectivity that are lacking, and that have to be fulfilled through marriage. That is, if they are trustworthy, honourable, respectable, marriageable subjects, why are they looking for a marriage partner to fulfil their expectations? What is missing from their stories, and what is lacking in their subjectivity? I will pursue these questions in the next chapter, tracing women’s narratives on their decisions, and this time pointing to their

assessments of their selves, their pasts, and their existing life situations on the basis of *loneliness*, as a register that points to that which *lacks*.

CHAPTER 5: LONELINESS



Figure 5-1: Picture shared on Esra Erol's Facebook Fan page: 'Those who try to be everything to everybody can be nothing to themselves.'

It was just before the live broadcast, and the female candidates were rushing to get ready while Sevil and I were talking about marriage, life, children, and her decision to remarry in general, and to look for a marriage partner on the show in particular (for a fuller account of my encounter with Sevil, see Chapter 4). The temporality of the show, which kept Sevil and me upstairs before the live broadcast, expanded our conversation to a lifetime as we narrated bits and pieces of our lives to each other in this intense present. It was intense firstly because we were comparing and sharing our life narratives in a small room in the midst of a flurry of activity; in other words, it was an escape from the routine aim of assessing the show into which was poured Sevil's narrative of life and relationships, and her re-consideration of her own place/position within that narrative. Besides being an *escape*, our conversation was part of her process of decision-making: was it the right thing at that particular moment of her life to step into the marriage show? Whilst the show was absorbing her life narrative into its flow, Sevil was also looking for a place in her life for the marriage show, so in a manner of speaking she was talking to the show when she was talking with me.

Following my analysis on the register of trust as deployed in the female candidates' narratives of their decisions (Chapter 4), in this chapter, I would like to focus on the register of loneliness. Specifically, I will trace how the candidates assess their existing situations, as they take up the show's invitation to get married at that particular moment of their lives. It is crucial to remember Özar and Yakut-Çakar's (2013) study on *women without men*, which shows how not being married or divorced, besides making individuals vulnerable to stigma, scrutiny and infantilisation, leaves them in a space of loneliness in a context where the family is the default source of livelihood (See Chapter 1). In this chapter, I would like to trace loneliness at the discursive level. More specifically, I would like to answer the following question: How *the self*, which is enhanced and enabled as a site under *restoration* through the state policies at social, biopolitical and economic levels, and as a narrative within the reality show genre, is expressed through the register of loneliness? This is the main question that I would like to grasp in this chapter.

Many times, when I asked the candidates how they decided to come to marriage show, they referred to their lives, their past, their relations with the people around them and their (emotional) situation. That is, in addition to their opinions and expectations about the show – which are oriented towards the format, towards other subjects of the show (the production staff, host, and other candidates) and towards themselves; the candidates evaluate what they left behind as well as what they brought with them into the studio: their narratives of life within which their relationships have been embedded.

First, how does the show make a call to assess their lives? This happens through the other candidates who come on stage and talk about their pasts and their future expectations. As audience members, candidates firstly aspired to assess their life situations as they watched and listened to other people's life narratives. Once those life narratives move them into the human flow of the show (as suitors or candidates), they also become self-narrators. It is crucial to note here that it is not a ready-made narrative

that is aired during the live broadcast. As I describe in Chapter 6, the format is based on the repeated telling of a life story during selection, preparation and live broadcast. Thus, life narrative becomes the generic form of expression in the space of the studio. Accordingly, my interviews with candidates are just another rehearsal/re-assessment of their situation, their life narratives, and how they feel about those narratives.

Second, it is not only that they begin to assess and narrate their lives because it is a necessity of the format, but the show provides them a break from their normal routines that allows them to critically assess their lives. Ricoeur (1991) argues that in order to assimilate life into a narrative, critical doubt is necessary, which can be achieved by gaining distance from lived experience. Candidates' decisions to come on the show insinuate this critical doubt and distance into their lives, and so their participation becomes both a physical and a critical break. My question is only one among a variety of nodes where they stop and assimilate their lives into stories in the course of their participation. Thus, within the confines of this chapter, I keep my focus on the particular event of the *decision* to participate in the show and look at how candidates recount their lives as they gain distance from their everyday lives within the marriage show studio.

As I argue throughout the dissertation, what is specific to the marriage show is that there are limits to self-narration and self-expression: the safe limits of self-expression need to be carefully observed on the show, at the risk of jeopardising the propriety of the subject in the search of a marriage partner, as well as its own credibility. As I argued in Chapter 2, the series of deaths in 2005 that resulted after women transgressed the normative boundaries of the family by revealing its secrets on talk shows revealed a dangerous edge to the narrating subjectivities.²⁰ I will try to depict how women as

²⁰ In Chapter 2, I cited 5 killings and suicides that were related to the killer's or victim's participation on a talk show. Here, I also discuss a television format in which familial secrets may be revealed. For example, one of the prevailing reasons women are killed in Turkey is because they demand a divorce, which is itself generally the result of their systematic exposure to violence. Thus, it is not only that they are exposed to violence, but also they are forced to keep it to themselves for the sake of their families. State family policy,

narrators of their own stories negotiate this edge through their intuitive knowledge of the limits of womanhood. One can see in these accounts how the limits of self-narratives are drawn on the basis of wider social norms that frame and control women's movement.

It is crucial to note here that I did not directly ask women to narrate their lives because, as I maintained earlier, I confined my questions to their assessments of the format, and since our interviews had to conform to the pacing of the show, they tended to be rather short. It is another important finding of my research that life narrative is a form of expression that candidates take on in reply to my questions.

Once I would ask about their decisions to come on the show, they would begin to share their particular and usually very personal self-narratives, which tended to reference feelings of loneliness. From this vantage point, loneliness can be defined as a point of *anchorage*, in Ricoeur's terminology, through which 'one finds a narrative understanding for living experience' (1981: 28). Loneliness appears as an anchorage for those who decide to try this popular new convention in matchmaking; it also anchors the self-narratives to each other.

It is also crucial to note that not all candidates narrated coherent, complete life stories. Their self-narrations were fragmented, usually relating to the moment at hand, i.e. whether we were discussing the moment of decision, preparation, the moment before or after meeting a suitor, etc. For my purposes, then, I focus on two female candidates' narratives based on my interviews with them. I analyse my interviews with these two women, first of all because theirs were longer in duration, and thus more complete accounts of life, which would thus allow me to more thoroughly analyse the references to the self. My choice of these two women can be regarded as their own choices as well:

in turn, prioritises the protection of the family unit over that of the woman. Thus, the family becomes the medium of intimacy. The contemporary feminist movement in Turkey has effectively uncovered the state's collusion with men as perpetrators of violence against women, and protests the courts' unfair handling of femicides with the motto: 'No male justice, real justice!'.

Both of these women were very eager to talk and were the ones to initiate contact with me during my field research. First, I would like to elaborate on my conversation with Sevil, which I began to address in Chapter 4. The other is Zehra, a 60-year-old woman who came to the show as a suitor. My conversations with these two women were particularly important because, first of all, they serve as two valuable examples of women's narratives as an interstitial linkage between the subject and wider social norms, which entails tensions, dilemmas and conflicts. Second they reveal the biases that I deal with throughout the research process, and as such, help me to see the particularity of each narrative I collect in the field, as well as exhibiting similarities with others.

5.1 Sevil: 'I always put myself on hold'

We first talked about where we live in Istanbul, how many children we have, how she looks younger than her age, how I look like one of her childhood friends, etc. She was an Istanbulite, having grown up in one of the old districts. After 13 years of marriage, she divorced 16 years ago and moved to another neighbourhood in Istanbul with her two children. She was a very young-looking woman. I could hardly believe that she had two children who were in their twenties. But it was also the case that she had married at a very early age, when she was 16. After introducing herself, 'Lots of stories you see', she said.

Yet, she did not present a detailed account of her past life. We did not talk about her marriage. In general, the failures, sufferings, tensions in her life as a woman were absent in the narrative. Rather, it was a proper story of a mother *par excellence*. When I asked how she had decided to go on the marriage show, Sevil repeatedly told me about how, after struggling all her life, now that she had raised her children, she found that she was lonely:

I raised my children. Two brilliant, young, successful, I mean, they are dutiful children towards their homeland, their nation, their mother and everybody. Then I realised, I always put myself on hold, for long time. I mean, I've learnt my rights from Esra, the more I watched, whenever I could watch.

First of all, the central plot in her life narrative was about her having raised her children, and how she had properly performed her task as a mother. She repeatedly brought this up during our conversation. Her voice was cheerful and proud when she spoke about her children; thus, rather than a story of regret, Sevil's personal narrative was a success story: *'I did everything on my own. I worked, I sent my children to school. I made them brilliant people.'* The first-person sentences imply that she is the central subject of this narrative, acting successfully within the confines of proper motherhood. She added, *'I made sure they would fit in wherever we went'* (*her yere sigdirdim*), which is an idiom in Turkish I very often hear from women, the meaning of which depends on context: *'I raised my children without bothering anybody'*, *'I always had enough space (sufficient financial and emotional resources) to provide for them'*. It may also mean *'I had no shortcomings that prevented me from fulfilling my children's needs without asking for help'*, which would be inappropriate for a single mother.²¹

However, as the narrative unfolds, Sevil points to a contradiction which makes the listener think that her first-person grammatical centrality was not intended to place her at the centre of the narrative. As her success story as a mother unfolded she gradually realised that her *self* was the *missing* subject of this story. *'I realised, I always put myself on hold, for long time'* became a turning point, as postponed *selfhood* was the apparent price of her success.

Sevil narrates her encounter with the show as a learning process through which she retrospectively assesses her past. It is crucial that she says she became aware how she postponed her *selfhood* as she watched and listened Esra Erol, and learnt her rights from her. Thus, she crafts her subjectivity by anchoring her life narrative to the narratives,

²¹ I did not ask Sevil what she meant by *'I made sure they would fit in wherever we went'* at the time, perhaps because I felt that I understood her meaning. Later on, when with the discourse analysis, I realised that the idiom is rich in meaning, and I needed to confirm that I understand it. I derived these meanings from a brainstorming session on Twitter. I would like to thank @elypheda and @dileknurpolat for taking part in the session.

instances, and judgements she hears from the marriage show. Accordingly, the decision to come on the show became a decision to cultivate her personhood.

Interestingly enough, she described what she learnt from Esra Erol as *rights*. Even though she did not refer to rights in their particularities, or rights as we know them, she juxtaposed them against her duties as a mother to her children, her family and her nation – her children embody these duties. Then, *rights* point to aspects of her subjectivity other than motherhood: to her individualistic needs. Thus, just as she was the central subject of her narrative, so too did she point to the need to become the central subject of her own life.

I argue that it is not only her individuality, but a certain type of individuality – i.e. a claim to her womanhood – that is hidden behind the word *rights*. Though not explicitly addressed, Sevil uses several strategies to signal to me that by saying *rights*, she refers to her needs and desires as a woman. When I asked her what she meant by rights, unsure if I would understand or not, she asked me whether or not I was married. I said ‘yes’, and she continued,

I mean, those who don't understand the power of words cannot understand people's power. That's why I ask. You say something, but one can understand only according to their capacity. If you were younger and single, I mean, if you were in your 20s, you wouldn't understand me. What was it that you asked?

Indeed, my being married helped us establish a communicative shorthand. *The capacity to understand* in her speech refers to the capacity to understand the unspoken parts of her answer. So, I understand that there is a secrecy at play, a conspiratorial secrecy wherein she was not revealing something to me as much as directing me toward something we both already knew as married women. We continued:

F: *Rights, what kind of rights?*

S: *I mean, how should I put it? There're things that you want to live, but you have always postponed for your children. Oh, do you know how I came to understand? It was not so easy. I did everything on my own. I worked, I sent my children to school. I made them brilliant people. I made sure they would fit in wherever we*

went. I fit them wherever I go. Now they're grown up. They used to ask my permission to go out. Now they go directly and call me from there. I felt lonely. I mean, everybody will see that, even if you're married, you also will feel the same thing one day. I don't regret, but I say, when they get married, they will not even see me. I could handle it up until now, but loneliness is really bad. I feel it. I really feel it, even though I am still healthy [enough to look after myself].

The only words that addressed my question, though left to my interpretation were, 'there are things that you want to live'. So, she made reference to desire while wanting it to be understood without unpacking. This can be understood as a rhetorical strategy, a 'rhetoric of silence' as Dana Cloud puts it, through which 'speakers gesture incompletely toward what cannot be uttered in a context of oppression' (1999: 178). She points out that silence is not always a choice of the narrator/rhetor, an outcome of the agency to choose what to speak out and what to keep silent. Rather, it is mostly a necessity for the 'member[s] of a marginalised or subordinate social group' (1999: 182). In line with this argument, she cites Clair's (1998) work on women's silences, and argues that 'in a context of male violence against women, one cannot regard silence as a voluntary choice, although it may be a survival strategy and/or form of counterhegemonic resistance' (1999: 182). Although it was a conversation between two women, Sevil was careful in addressing her desires as a woman, revealing but not unpacking them in the context of a tacit agreement between two women. I was also trying to be careful with my follow-up questions, as the other side of the agreement is maintaining her confidence and not putting her in an uncomfortable position. It may be true that as two women know the limits of expressing our desires, we do not want to grasp *desire*, which is hidden behind a rhetoric of *rights*. Perhaps it may be about the level of intimacy that should be maintained between two people who met just a few minutes ago. Nevertheless, I wish to emphasise that the silence/secrecy at play here is about marriage. This intuitive knowledge about what to say vs. what to keep silent is, according to Sirman (2002), one of the foundational requirements of the nation that maintains the preeminence of the modern nuclear Turkish

family model. The modern family is formulated and represented in the registers of the state, as well as in women's novels and magazines as a *model to be achieved* at the expense of keeping its *actual* structures of relation, domination and violence a secret (Sirman, 2002). Female subjectivity is constituted through (self-)discipline in order to keep the secrets of family (domestic violence, marriage without consent, marriage with close relatives, the prevalence of extended family and various other forms of intimacy as opposed to the official and cultural privileging of nuclear family, so on). What is foremost to this kind of self-discipline, as Sirman suggests, is keeping female subjectivity as the secret of the family (see Chapter 2). I argue that even if she has already moved into the milieu of the reality show where self-expression is promoted and privileged, Sevil's difficulties in addressing her rights as 'things I want to live', without much elaboration shows that she intuitively knows and observes these limits to self-expression. I am also complicit in this scenario, leaving my curiosity as a researcher apart, and acknowledging the limits that she wants to maintain while addressing herself and her desire to get married.

Thus, without much elaboration, she repeats her struggle to raise her children, and how she ended up lonely. Desire is only implied rather than being openly declared. It is obviously not about further achievement as a mother or improving her relationship with her children. Rather, it is about a specific kind of loneliness which is felt in the absence of her children, yet which would not be resolved with their return to her life. Then, what kind of loneliness is this?

First of all, she addresses loneliness as a destiny, a natural stage in a life course:

I felt lonely. I mean, everybody will see that, even if you're married, you'll also feel the same thing one day. I don't regret but I say, when they get married, they will not even see me. I could handle it up until now, but loneliness is really bad. I feel it. I really feel it, even though I am still healthy [enough to look after myself].

On the face of it, her comments do not engage the register of rights: everybody, as she says, may feel lonely at some stage of their lives, e.g. when one loses her partner, or when her children are grown up. As a natural stage of life, these seem to be the safest anchorage for a self-narrative: it is lived and felt by everybody. However, she also engages another register which seems to contradict the first: loneliness is an awareness of something lacking in the past, and so *rights* refers to what had been lacking. As she tells of her successes with her children – that she provided for their needs without bothering anybody –, she also says that she did so at the expense of postponing her own life. In the end, her children have their own places, and she sees that they have separate lives, which she lacks. Thus *rights* refers to a postponed need to have her own life.

What is of interest to me in this reference to a (missing) self in Sevil's account is that it is a self that was postponed until it was brought out by Esra Erol's show. Once she has been reminded that she may be lonely; that is, once the program *moves* her into a lonely selfhood which could be cured by moving into the human flow of the show, selfhood itself comes into existence, at first to feel its loneliness. Yet, I argue that this movement is a movement within the limits of the self-narrative. That is to say, as soon as the program opens up a space within which Sevil assesses her selfhood, she fills this space with a self-narrative. Her movement across different aspects of her subjectivity is a movement within a narrative of selfhood. Ricoeur makes a distinction between being 'the narrator and the hero of our own story' and 'actually becoming the author of our own life' (Ricoeur 1991: 32). Nevertheless, Bridget Byrne notes that the narrator is not always the hero of her own narrative either. In life narratives, according to Byrne, 'not all individuals are able to present themselves at all times as coherent, whole subjects of a storied narrative' (2003: 33). That is, they do not always fill the position of the subject as they account for their *selves*. This is especially remarkable in women's narratives, as she quotes from Bertraux-Wiame, wherein they 'talk at length about their 'relationship to

such and such a person', in contrast to men who 'present themselves as the subjects of their own lives' (1982: 192-3, quoted in Byrne 2003: 35). In this case, Sevil moves from the position of a female narrator who does not fill the position of central subject in her own life narrative to a subject who looks for her *self* in her own narrative. The show calls on her to become the central subject of her own narrative by pointing to a void in her subjectivity so that she produces a narrative in the quest to fill that position.

Then, I would like to ask, does she become the central subject of her life through self-narration, which is the outcome of an aspiration to get married? I will seek to answer this question by looking at the second aspect of Sevil's register of loneliness: it is not only about acknowledging her *self* as the missing subject of her own life; but also it is felt in the absence of *an intimate other*. Thus, what makes her feel her selfhood, which had been postponed in the presence of intimate others (i.e. her children), also makes her feel lonely in her selfhood. When I asked further how she defines loneliness, she finds this question difficult, saying: '*Defining loneliness? It is impossible to tell with words, it is just felt. I've never thought about explaining loneliness*'. We laughed. I asked her just to give examples, '*For example*', I said, '*I don't like eating alone*'. My example inspired her to elaborate on her everyday life more:

S: Oh, of course. You feel it when you're alone at home. Believe me, we're five siblings you see. I live in the same building with my sisters, brothers and mom. Sometimes one can feel lonely in crowds. That's why I can't explain it with words. My children, siblings, sisters-in-law, grandchildren, mom, everybody are around. My friends... But it is like... How can I explain it? I mean, I am surrounded by people.

F: Then, you mean it is about having a partner you love?

S: I think it is. Yes, I think it is. Perhaps that's why I am here. I don't know if it is right or wrong. I mean, I am a self-sustaining person. But you hear something from somebody here (on the marriage show), then you say, yes, yes that is it. Believe me, it is not about sexuality, or money. I have money, I have everything, I have a house. Above all, I am a healthy person. I am healthy. But it is like what you said perhaps.

The twist between different definitions of selfhood is noteworthy: she switches between a missing selfhood and a self-sustaining individual in two different registers of loneliness. She points to deferral of her selfhood in relation to her children, which she realised in her loneliness, but she is a self-sustaining individual as well. Living among her extended family, she is not actually alone when she feels lonely. That is, as her self-narrative unfolds, she addresses a specific sense of selfhood which is in need of a specific form of intimacy, one not fulfilled through the presence of her children, friends, siblings and relatives.

If the intimacy she seeks is one felt in the absence of intimate others, what kind of intimacy is she looking for? I would like to emphasise here that I find it difficult to resist nudging her, like the show itself, to articulate her loneliness for a partner, at the expense of violating the women's pact of discretion. She is constituting a narrative on how she feels lonely, while also being a bit uncomfortable addressing this loneliness. As I quoted earlier, she asked my age, and whether I was married or not. And again as I noted earlier, this is to assess how to code the way she expresses her *attraction* (to the show), making sure that I would understand both what she does and does not say. She explains that she is missing a sense of intimacy that cannot be filled by her children and other loved ones but stops short of articulating that she is looking for a man and a marriage partner.

As I push her to define her desire as a desire for a marriage partner, the secret begins to be revealed; but interestingly, as soon as she does so she also draws limits around her revelation. She declares that this endeavour is *not* (first and foremost) about a sexual desire, and she immediately dismisses monetary need as well. This time, Sevil claims a self-sustaining individuality which does not need a man's support to survive. From this vantage point, she disclaims any kind of dependency. Neither is she looking for a (mere) sex partner. Rather, she seeks lifelong companionship to cure the feeling of loneliness in the present, as well as to prevent loneliness in the future; still, this companionship should

not depend on volatile factors like passion. In addition, it is an intimacy that will prevent her from becoming the central subject of her narrative, filling the void of selfhood with marriage. Interestingly enough, the way she draws limits on how to address her desire very much reminds me of Sirman's definition of companionate marriage as formulated and represented in the realist novels of Halide Edip, an early Republican Turkish female writer. Companionate marriage, according to Sirman, connects the couple to each other with a special form of intimacy based on love and care, yet which is devoid of *passion* which would otherwise jeopardise 'serenity, stability and continuity, in short the family' (2000b: 331). She points to the distinction made between the words which stand for love in Turkish: *aşk* for passionate love and *sevgi* for 'the deep attachment between intimate persons such as friends, parents and also between the individual and the nation, citizen and state and among citizens themselves' (2000b: 335). In order to achieve a good, proper, stable marriage, *aşk* has to be transformed into *sevgi*, which will not only keep the male and female parties attached to each other, but also secure and maintain their devotion to the nation.

It may seem anachronistic to find similarities between women's articulations of their desires in early Republican novels (written at the beginning of the 20th century), and in a contemporary reality show format. Nevertheless, different definitions of love as passion vs. devotion and care are noted in other contemporary research. In her study on marriage arrangements and mate selection in two villages in Manisa, Western Anatolia, Kimberly Hart addresses a similar distinction made between *sevgi* and *aşk* in villagers' accounts of marriage, and notes that they defined *aşk* as 'a complex mixture of emotions which cause one to suffer', which is not necessarily regarded as a good reason to marry (2007: 353). In a similar manner, in her study on the narratives of paths of marriage among a group of couples in Istanbul, Tekçe observes how narratives of love are usually conflated with rational calculations on one hand, and familial involvement on the other.

My own study on the female audiences of television melodrama in Turkey provides an example of how women enjoy and embrace female characters' falling in *passionate* love at the level of narrative, while harshly criticising at the normative level and judging love stories as unrealistic (Akınerdem 2005).

While distinguishing her *willingness* to get married from sexual desire, I suggest that Sevil also keeps track of a similar distinction. This is because sexual desire is full of ambivalences, and because ambivalence itself 'is seen as the failure of a relation' (Berlant, 2008: 2), that desire/passion/sexuality is concealed, kept as a secret, and ultimately very tentatively addressed in Sevil's self-narrative.

From this vantage point, Sevil's narration of the self can be understood in relation to Sirman's (2000b) definition of (proper) subjecthood for the 'modern Turkish woman' within which self-assertion and compassion merge in a very specific manner:

The modern Turkish woman is a subject with a specific agency, a socially competent individual who, as a result of her education, is able to cultivate her mind, but who also, through love, is ready to provide and sacrifice self and desire for the care and guidance of others, especially within marriage and the family. (2000b, 263.)

Within this framework, Sevil's account of loneliness, through which she merges a missing selfhood with self-sustaining individuality, and delicately differentiates between willingness to get married and sexual desire, guides me to trace Sevil's search for maintaining the *safe* limits of self-narration. After achieving a sense of selfhood in the absence of her children and responding to the call of the marriage show, she already begins to draw limits on that selfhood by defining the void it causes in her life as loneliness. Loneliness endows Sevil with an agency towards proper subjecthood within the confines of proper forms of intimate relations. Therefore, Sevil becomes the central

subject of her narrative who will conclude the story by submitting her selfhood into marriage as *the* proper form of intimacy.

Then, what is specific to the marriage show format that Sevil narrates in a unique account of loneliness, which nevertheless is connected to various other life narratives as told in various other contexts, and at various other moments? I suggest that it is when Sevil responds to the marriage show's call – as I quoted her earlier, '*but you hear something from somebody here (at the marriage show), then you say, yes, yes it is*' – that her selfhood emerges as loneliness and thereby becomes something that needs to be dealt with. As such, the show first enables selfhood to be felt as the missing subject of her life through individual narratives and calls on her to look at herself from the same stance; in doing so, as she puts it, the show teaches her her rights. Then, the show also calls on her to cure her loneliness. However, this is not to argue that the show tells her she is lonely and suggests itself as the only appropriate way to cure loneliness. As I examine in detail in Part 3 (Chapters 6-8), the production process entails very subtle negotiations between the producers, the candidates and the audiences, which maintain the frames of the show in accordance with wider social norms. It is because those frames are well maintained that Sevil can find a safe pathway to talk about her loneliness, and to walk through those pathways throughout our conversation. Thus, the work of producing the marriage show, and the subject's investment in it as a pathway to marriage, outline normative limits at every level: framing the show and limiting the self-narratives are where the conventions of matchmaking collide with the production of the marriage show as a specific reality show format.

I will move on telling another candidate's account of her decision to participate in the marriage show in the next section. Obviously, every self-narrative is anchored to the marriage show in a particular way. By putting these two individual stories side by side, I aim to more deeply explore how norms and affects that shape the format also constitute

multiple aspects of women's subjectivities in their particular life courses/life situations by offering them acceptable forms of self-narrative.

5.2 Zehra: 'I wanted to see him, if it pleases God'

Another woman, Zehra, asserts loneliness in a particular way while addressing her decision to come on the show. She was another informant who left an impression on me. She was 60-year-old Muslim preacher in a local *medrese* (theological school, which does not have legal status) in Istanbul. She was wearing a full-length black veil, free of make-up and plain of dress, unlike the majority of the female candidates. Just as I was thinking about how to approach her for an interview in the female candidates' room –my usual shyness before every such attempt – she herself asked me what I was doing there. I explained my purpose and our conversation started. She was there as a suitor, and waiting her turn to go on stage. I asked how she decided to come to the show; she answered,

I was already considering marriage. It is very difficult to be alone after 60. I wanted to have a companion in the autumn of my life.

What I was hearing in her calm and determined voice was that she was not reluctant, like Sevil, to come on the show. So she did not answer my question through the show, i.e. how she felt about the show, and did not ask questions about the show in return. Rather, from the very first moment, she answered my question about her decision to come on the show as a decision to get married. It was as if the marriage show was already a conventional path for marriage. Thus, she began to explain why she wanted to marry. It was at this point that she took the register of loneliness on: It was because she was ageing, and because it was difficult to be alone in the 'autumn' of a life course, that she decided to get married.

Yet I was still in pursuit of my question and asked why she specifically preferred a marriage show: '*I came for a candidate*', she answered. I asked whether it was the first time she considered meeting a candidate; '*No*', she replied,

I considered other candidates, but they were younger than me. I preferred him because he is around 66-67. I wanted to see him, if it pleases God.

She was still talking from inside of a conventionality, and I was insistently looking for a plot of *passage* that made her participation to the show a turning point, a significant moment in her life – something that was different from what she would normally have done. Before moving on to her self-narrative and account on loneliness, I would like to dwell on my own position in this conversation. Indeed, one of the conventions of the marriage show which audiences in Turkey usually find unconventional for matchmaking is that women also ask to meet male candidates. On several occasions I encountered questions like ‘how can a woman ask for the hand of a man, and what’s more, on television?’ As a researcher critical of these judgemental questions, though, I nevertheless could not help but feel surprised about Zehra, a thoroughly religious woman, a preacher, with a position of leadership within a small religious community. That she would consider coming on the marriage show, and that she had chosen to try to meet one among a variety of candidates. Indeed I had enough experience in the field not to be tempted to go looking for contradictions. Moreover, the seeming contradiction was produced by my own subjectivity about social norms among religious women.

On the other hand, I think Zehra was also aware of such (potential) criticisms – or perhaps she saw the astonishment in my eyes. So she noted, ‘*I wanted to see him, if it pleases God*’, emphasising that she sees herself as following religious norms/conventions on her way to marriage. That is to say, in anticipation of criticism about her participation, she made a point of confirming that she sought God’s approval for her participation. This concern was also evident in other parts of her explanation.

I proceeded to the next question and asked her opinion about marrying on television in general. This time she replied by addressing the difficulties of her decision as follows:

Indeed it was very difficult for me. I am a preacher, I have a community, I have students. Everybody will see me, I will have to explain this to everybody. So, it is

difficult, but I always say, is there any difference between being in crowds at public transport wearing my veil, at a crowded marketplace or on Esra Erol's show wearing my veil? I think there is no difference at all. In the end, you're in public in all cases.

In response to my question, she began to articulate her thoughts about the show, and about how her participation entailed a passage, a decision (as I was expecting). However, her hesitation was not due to a perceived moral contradiction but to concern over her social position and the idea that her community might criticise her for appearing on TV as a pious, veiled woman. So she posed her response to such potential criticism whilst answering my question: it was not herself but the very criticism which was contradictory. By rejecting the potential criticism around her she was embracing her religious subjectivity.

One of the crucial arguments that I would like to retain throughout my dissertation is that there are always multiple norms at play, which are juxtaposed, merged, and negotiated among a variety of subjects who participate in the production of the show (see Chapters 6-8). As a female suitor, Zehra brings religion into the show as a norm, emphasising that the format of the marriage show (as a pathway to marriage) does not contradict the religious morality upon which she builds her subjectivity, her everyday movements/actions in public.

This discursive manipulation of religious morality, however, does constitute a break between her own religious subjectivity and the norms of the wider religious community. If I turn back to my feelings, perhaps I identified with her as a Muslim woman who is quite familiar with the social control mechanisms within religious communities. I think my knowledge of her situation and assumptions about her reciprocally shaped this conversation. I insisted on looking for contradictions in her situation, and she argued accordingly, as if she were responding to complaints from her local community while indeed answering my questions.

It is at the moment of such a break, when she temporarily *suspends* her communal ties, that she proceeds to reveal another site of rupture between her and her religious community. The real issue is that she has a singular status within a community to whom she is committed as a *hoca* (teacher of religion). This is where she takes on the register of loneliness to talk back to her community from a distance:

Besides, those who will criticise me, who will say, 'why did hoca do this?' are not with hoca when she needs them. Hoca is alone; on Mother's Day, on her birthday, on all those special days, on holidays hoca is always alone. Nobody asks 'how are you, do you need anything?' Everybody makes ignorant comments. For example, I am a preacher, I talk to a community, I am a hatib (public speaker), I am a medrese teacher. I have been involved in divinity for years. But nobody is with me. I know what to say if they offend me. I am also a poet, I write poems, I have published a collection of my poems. I am a congenial person, I love people, I love all creatures because of the Creator. Things happen only if God has predestined them, wishes them to happen. If my dear Creator has sent me here, it must be a manifestation of the divine wisdom.

In the first part of her explanation, she puts an emphasis on her position as *hoca*. While doing this, she addresses herself in the third person, temporarily taking an outsider position, a narrator who looks at the relationship between *hoca* and her community, and points to the absent forms of engagement/intimacy between them. The narrator draws attention to different aspects of being a *hoca* which are totally ignored by her community, whom she cares for, and whom she teaches, though who are in turn ready to judge her. Thus, the contradiction is not a normative but an emotional one: there is nobody to take care of her in her private life; that is, in subject positions other than being a teacher – as a woman, as a mother, in an intimate relationship with someone, whether within or from outside her community. While she complains that her community ignores her, she also reveals different aspects of her subjectivity that do not contradict her religious identity but that exceed her communal role and relationships. Thus, unlike Sevil, it is not that she

postponed her *self* for the sake of her duties; rather, Zehra views her community as limiting aspects of her subjectivity.

It is also crucial to note that she moves from the position of a third-party narrator to the position of first-person self-narrator as she addresses her feelings of loneliness amidst a community. The rhetoric of self in the first person enters as she focuses on different aspects of her subjectivity. Then biographical data begin to emerge: besides being a scholarly person, she writes poems, she loves people, and so on. In the absence of the community, and at the expense of being criticised by them, she reveals different aspects of her subjectivity through the register of loneliness. Belgin Tekçe's argument about the distance between the narrating self and the protagonist of a life story is helpful for understanding the shifting registers of self in Zehra's account. In her study of the life stories of married women, Tekçe argues that:

The act of narration creates a distance between the narrating self and the protagonist of the story, which can be used with varying degrees of skill to discuss normatively problematic situations, decisions while maintaining moral standing of the self (2004: 183).

According to Tekçe, the *narrator* distances herself from the *protagonist* in order to critically assess her own situation. This critical distance in Zehra's account, nevertheless, enables her to assess the limits assigned to her as a *hoca*, which keep other aspects of her subjectivity out of frame. The register of loneliness enables her to move between the roles of third-person narrator and first-person subject of her own narrative. She is both moved to the show and anchored to an intimate self-narrative through the register of loneliness. As in the case of Sevil, the show conjures up a life narrative about unacknowledged aspects of her subjectivity creating a void that needs to be filled.

Nevertheless, as she tracks different aspects of her subjectivity, she also maintains that religion is, first and foremost, a normative scheme for the self. Thus, she embraces

the conventions of the program because she views them as complying with religious dictates, though not necessarily with communal prejudices. So, she insists that her participation in the show does not deviate from religious schemes of marriage and matchmaking; her positionality is also evident in her emphasis on the fact that she would only care to meet the candidate if it pleases God.

What I would like to emphasise is that, far from contradictory, religion becomes intertwined with the register of loneliness in opening up a space for the self to act according to its emotional needs, longings, desires in Zehra's account. In the case of Sevil it was motherhood, and in her own case is her position as a *hoca* that separated her from her desires, needs, longings. Thus, she articulates her desire for marriage through the notion of intimacy rather than a sense of community. As a result, like Sevil, Zehra's desire is oriented towards companionate marriage which is promoted and represented as the modern/proper form of intimacy. She appeals to popular representations of proper womanhood such as Mother's Day to address her loneliness. I think it is not coincidence that, like Sevil, Zehra also emphasises that her motivation to marry does not stem from sexual desire while expressing her expectations from marriage: '*I would like to go on the Hac and Umre with my husband. It is not sexual intimacy that I am seeking at this age*'.

I think her words clearly demonstrate how she articulates different aspects of her subjectivity which may be deemed contradictory: she is looking for a husband, a companion who will be with her on birthdays and on Mother's Day, and with whom she can participate in religious rituals like pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, Zehra's story did not end in a marriage on the marriage show. She went to the show as a suitor, to meet a male candidate but did not go on stage. Instead – in the only case of this I saw in all my visits to the field – the staff made an exception to the rule about male and female participants meeting outside of the public gaze and

permitted Zehra and the male candidate to meet backstage after the show. They decided not to go out on a date and Zehra left the show.

In conclusion to this section, I would like to dwell on Zehra's leaving. Though I did not trace Zehra's story further, nor did I follow up with the staff about her situation, I still wonder, even after writing this chapter about her, why she did not go on stage. Was it her decision to meet the candidate backstage, or could it have been that she was thought by the production staff not to be an appropriate suitor to bring on stage? Or might it have simply been that she was unable to come back at a later date and they did not want to decline her request to meet the candidate? In the absence of a clear, straightforward answer, and without wanting to project something onto either her or the staff, I would like to emphasise that, from the very first moment I saw her, I felt that she was already exceeding the limits of self-expression, as a woman who complicates the frames controlling women's public appearance and movement in Turkey. I am very familiar with these frames as a Muslim woman who is exposed to discrimination at different levels for being veiled, and who is judged for not being modern enough for secular people and too modern for some religious people in Turkey. Interestingly enough, my gaze was also shifting over the course of this encounter: I took the position of her community when I assessed her religiosity and shifted to a secular gaze while assessing her according to her appearance.

As a woman dressed head-to-toe in a black veil, she was an icon of *threats to the nation*, and as such, that which is constitutive outside of the modern, secular, national subjectivity. No matter that a veiled woman may also view herself as a nationalist – be it on different grounds, through different registers – she is kept outside of the hegemonic representation of the nation in public. The 'black veil' is symbolic of the religious subordination of women and consequently of underdevelopment for Turkish secular nationalism (Kemalism), which has been imprinted on the people through the national

education system since primary school. Indeed underdevelopment itself has paradoxes for Turkish nationalist imaginary: it is both a fear of becoming backward by approximating to *the East* (the full black veil is associated with Arabs) as well as moving backwards in time (to the Ottoman period, which Kemalism has posed as socio-politically corrupt). One of my earliest childhood memories was seeing the depictions of Kemalist reforms in my school books, in which the image of a ‘modern’ woman with properly set blonde hair was juxtaposed against the image of a woman in a black veil representing the defeated Ottoman regime, which was accompanied by images depicting the replacement of the Arabic alphabet in Ottoman script with the Latin alphabet for Turkish script. The black veil also represents anxiety and fear about the future. That is to say, it is deemed as an extreme expression of the Islamist project under the conservative rule of AK Parti. As the ruling party since 2002, the party has declared an intention to replace Kemalist ideology and ‘close a 100-year parentheses’, implying that, at least at a very symbolic level, they embrace the Ottoman legacy. As such, the AK Parti triggers anxiety among the nationalist elites in Turkey, which keeps the discriminatory discourses against the veil alive. I do not want to discuss the AK Parti’s ambivalent relationship to the Ottoman past, or their role in the mass polarisation of Turkish society and the triggering of fear and discrimination against veiled women. What I would like to emphasise here is that my encounter with Zehra, her movement into the flow of the marriage show, her narrative about her participation, and her ultimate inability to go on stage crosscut all these debates and feelings that ultimately limit and shape women’s bodies and movements in public. The television screen itself thereby circumscribes a limit on certain manifestations of the self, registering them as extreme or incomprehensible. On the other hand, as a woman who was raised in the middle of the public debates on the public appearance of women in Turkey, this may also just be a shortcut explanation for me to read/narrate Zehra’s story by putting her appearance at the centre. As I listened to her story, recounted it in my mind

several times, and ultimately write it here, I am still not sure that whether it was Zehra who was kept out of frame at the marriage show, or me who was trapped in a repertoire of gazes that monitors the movement of women on the basis of *hegemonic consistency*. Yet, as I have tried to show, the representational scheme of propriety has never been totally abolished on television. Rather, I argue that the marriage show format has introduced new and subtle forms for maintaining proper subjecthood, including subjects deemed appropriate for marriage.

5.3 Conclusion to Chapter 5

In this chapter, I have traced two women's particular, unique accounts of loneliness. It goes without saying that their lives have followed different courses, that they have different senses of self, different modes of addressing their feelings. What is at stake here is that loneliness is a register that connects differing accounts within the human flow of the marriage show without losing their particularities. Here, I would like to refer to Lauren Berlant's point that women's genres mediate 'what is singular, in the details, and general about the subject' (2008: 4). Taking self-narration as a form promoted and enabled by the reality show, I argue that these accounts both address what is singular and what is general about the subject, and anchor all these singularities into the marriage show as a generality – i.e. a format. In this way, the format becomes a new convention of matchmaking, one based on subjects' particular accounts which re-work the past and pose their future expectations in the intense present of televisual production.

I argue that loneliness works both affectively and normatively. Loneliness moves the subject affectively at two levels: First, as an audience member hearing the life narratives of other candidates, she assesses her particular situation, *moves* into the human flow of the show, and becomes a candidate. Second, she *moves* to produce a particular account of self. At this second level, she is anchored to the flow of the show as a candidate, and as she narrates her life, she accounts for her movement as a decision. Thus,

the movement is signified as an action (Ricoeur 1981). That is, by using loneliness as an anchorage, she narrates that particular moment of movement as a decision, i.e. doing something for herself. In this way, I argue, the show facilitates both women to be able to place themselves as the central subjects of their own narratives, which is not an easy task, as seen in both accounts above.

On the other hand there is a limit to self-expression, and the female candidates leave the central position in their narratives as soon as they articulate their willingness to get married. I argue that loneliness is a means through which they emerge as the central subjects, yet, which also draw the normative limits to the self. In both Sevil and Zehra's accounts, the principal limit to self-expression resides in their mode of expressing their desire/willingness to cure their loneliness, or to obtain what they lack. From this vantage point, loneliness is not a state in which someone wants to remain too long because it may trigger a set of ambiguities: what is this loneliness going to end in? While anchoring the subjects to the format, and to each other through the register of loneliness, the marriage show simultaneously defines it as a problem and prescribes marriage as a solution to it.

I also tried to show that there are limits to expressing women's desires for marriage. Though coming from different social backgrounds, I tried to depict how both Zehra and Sevil confine their desire to marry within what Sirman (2000b) calls *companionate marriage*. Both of their accounts comply with the safe limits of desire.

Sevil carefully keeps her desire a secret through the vague expression '*things one wants to live*'. Trying to limit different aspects of her subjectivity to the proper definitions of womanhood, she secures the secret of marriage to my understanding of being a married woman, without much revelation. I think above all, what is concealed in her self-narration is the knowledge that marriage, as women know and experience it, does not promise to give them what they want to live. Indeed this secret resides within her success story about her children *as* a success story about her life. This success was acquired during her

previous marriage then forgotten/silenced/kept secret. It is possible that because she moved into the flow of the show in order to find her missing sense of selfhood in marriage again that she only refers to her desires obliquely rather than openly discussing them with me.

On the other hand, Zehra speaks openly about the various facets of her subjectivity. While Sevil carefully walks a tightrope, Zehra pushes through the prejudices of her community, of the marriage show staff, of the researcher, discussing per positionality relative to religious doctrine, community normativity and belonging, and her individual feelings.

In this chapter, I have also argued that what is lacking in the subject, and thus what will be completed by achieving a good, proper marriage, is articulated through the register of loneliness. Loneliness is an anchorage between the subject and the show: while the show hails the subject to talk about her *self*, to locate herself as the central subject of her own life story, loneliness draws the pathway for self-narration by pointing to a lack that emerges when the subject experiences loneliness. Thus, loneliness both imbues the subject with a sense of *self* and enables her to talk about her *self* within safe limits, i.e. in pursuit of a marriage which will cure her loneliness.

***PART -3- MOVING IN THE
MARRIAGE SHOW***

CHAPTER 6: FRAMES

In Part 2 (Chapters 4-5), I address how female candidates narrate their decisions to come to the marriage show. First, I argue that the registers they engage in their decision-making process put an emphasis on a reflexive, responsible self who assesses her present situation and acts within certain calculations, and who takes responsibility for her own life. This kind of subjectivity is not a given; rather, it is a position that the reality show calls on its subjects to take towards the aim of having a good life, i.e. to have a happy, worthy, complete life. This kind of life, as the show *ideally* promotes and promises, can be achieved through marriage. On the other hand, as I show in my informants' accounts of how they decided whether or not to come on the show, they are rarely the central subjects of their own narratives, endowed with this kind of self-reflexivity. Rather, the decision is made in negotiation with significant others, and responsibility for it is shared by/disseminated among those significant others. Accordingly, their participation in the show entails various normative negotiations on the basis of their position within their family, and/or within specific communities that they are affiliated with, and at a larger scale, as responsible female citizens of the nation.

What, then, comes after deciding to participate in the show? What kind of a pathway to marriage does the show offer? How does it absorb subjects who come to their sense of self through the process of responding to the show's call, but who also bring various facets of their personal subjectivity, relationships, and responsibility towards their families and communities? How does the show deal with multiple subjectivities, selves, and relationships within the framework of a reality show format based on *revelations of the self*? More specifically, how does the show *deal with* the sense of *the self* that it puts into play: by retaining alliances with *the family* (as the prevalent form of intimacy, which is also connected to other communal ties and national belonging), which have a central role in conventional processes of matchmaking?

As a popular daytime television show, the marriage show receives hundreds of phone calls a day from potential candidates, only some of whom are eventually invited to the program. The production process includes negotiations between **the candidates**, who have already gone through a complex screening process, and **the staff**, who are charged with selecting the most suitable marriage candidates while also producing an interesting, lively TV show to attract audiences' attention, provide them an enjoyable viewing experience, and entice some to come and participate in the show as potential suitors. Over the course of fieldwork, I found observing candidates' decision-making processes and staff's day-to-day routines intriguing. Tension between candidates' concerns and the staff's efforts become more visible if we consider that the success of the marriage show's three-hour live broadcast relies solely on the continuous audience participation. Thus, every encounter between staff and candidates involves the question of the marriage show's legitimacy as a pathway to marriage with the imperatives of producing a three-hour live reality show.

I examine these encounters using the concept of frame as an analytical tool. What I would like to demonstrate in this chapter is that those very subtle normative negotiations over **who can appear on the screen, who can marry whom, and under what terms and conditions**, take place as the candidates move through the various stages of participation (calling in, going to the studio, being screened, and finally going on stage). All these are what I call framing moments. I borrow the term *frame* from Butler (2009) to trace how candidates enter the show's production process. In her study on war photography, Butler dwells on how the act of framing becomes an interpretative act: 'the frame functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself.' (2009: 71). According to Butler, in the context of war, the frames of the image draw the contours of *life* itself: the framing of injury and death compel interpretation about whose life is worthy of being recognised as a life, and as such, whose life is grievable by a global

audience. She argues that taking a photograph is a normative act that ‘contributes to the scene’ through its selection and composition of that which is deemed representable, and what is worth circulating worldwide to arouse a response against human suffering and outrage.

In a similar manner, I argue that the production process of the marriage show is a process of framing. I extend the notion of the frame from the visual to all kinds of activities that circumscribe who is considered a proper marriage candidate/proper participant on the marriage show. The frames of the marriage show are thus normative schemes that simultaneously register candidates as proper subjects of marriage and representable subjects throughout their participation in the show. By participation, I refer to the whole process involving the **selection** of participants as **candidates**, their **preparation** for the show on their way to becoming **proper marriage candidates**, and ultimately their **movement** onto the stage in order to narrate their life stories, outline their future expectations with respect to marriage, and in some cases, their **eviction** from the show. Thus, I use frame to refer to all kinds of (physical, normative, emotional) boundaries that candidates (and suitors) cross in order to participate in the show, making it an acceptable and proper pathway to marriage. The ultimate frame is that of the television screen, within which the live show takes place and candidates and suitors meet after making it through all the screening processes.

I would like to begin with Esra Erol’s own description of the format as a pathway to marriage:

***Q:** How do you define the format?*

***EE:** I first ask whether you’re single [We laugh]. How do I define the format? Indeed it is an arranged marriage format, but a modern one. Nowadays people already meet on the Internet, or social media. Nobody knows about these meetings, except maybe very close friends. However, millions witness their meeting here. Our doors are open to everybody who wants to get married. Of course there are age limits and criteria, like mental health [a few seconds silence], personality,*

morality, customs and traditions, their mistakes in the past. We assess the degree of those [mistakes]. I mean, there may be some mistakes due to ignorance, everybody can tolerate them. But if there are unrecoverable faults, we evict them from the show.

Indeed her first, humorous answer demonstrates how the show is produced and seen as a format based on marriage, such that an enquiry about the format is readily answered with a counter-question. After the question of marital status, she gets to the implicit question of whether this format can be considered a type of arranged marriage, following matchmaking conventions and norms. She additionally emphasises the show's publicity, which means that the meetings of candidates and suitors are witnessed by an audience. Finally, she reveals that there is always a limit to the *generosity* of the show, since not all potential candidates and suitors are deemed appropriate.

In this chapter, I seek to cover all the steps of candidates' pathways to the stage. More specifically, I show how the marriage show's frames are endowed with the norms of matchmaking and conventions of the format. At every instance of encounter, I examine the various norms addressed as criteria for moving the candidates into the marriage show's flow; namely, family involvement, marriage age, *denklik* (equivalence), and the debate of religious contract, all of which enable the production staff and candidates to collaboratively register the show as a pathway to marriage. What is at stake here is that the staff address the conventions of the format and the conventions of mating/matchmaking simultaneously as the basis for their criteria to select and allow candidates into the human circuit of the marriage show. Thus, for example, while describing the call centre's work of candidate selection, the staff very subtly use questions about callers' ages to interrogate their authenticity. In a similar manner, they justify the work of maintaining equivalence between a candidate and a suitor on the basis of not offending either party, which they describe as a prevailing convention of the format. Thus,

the show is registered as a form of quality programming which elicits trust from the candidates, as I argued in detail in Chapter 4.

In addition, as I will show in this chapter, the marriage show is an outcome of the way people flow through a three-hour broadcast five times a week, which makes the work of framing difficult. What struck me most during my visits was how quickly everything moved in the studio. Once an audience member decides to become a prospective candidate, and is selected and prepared by the staff – which involves subtle normative negotiations over marrying on TV on the candidates' side, and discussions about 'who/what can appear on screen' and 'who can get married' on the staff's side – the live broadcast proceeds thanks to the efforts of all parties according to a largely pre-determined flow. As I demonstrate in following sections in detail, I use the term *flow* to refer to the actual flow of the show, which is basically a document tentatively outlining what, how, and who will appear on screen during the live broadcast (for a detailed account on flow, see Section 6.4). At this level, the concern is the rapid temporality within which the show is actualised. Candidates and staff must be in place on time. The *program blocks* (the live stream between two commercial breaks) must be filled properly. The footage must be cued and run on time. The captions must appear on screen on time. Under pressure of time, there is indeed very little time for negotiation; people and things must simply be and be done on time. Because of this, the production process of the show entails **leakages**, the unexpected, sometimes unintended situations that take place on stage, and which indeed make the show a distinctive and exciting viewing experience from the audience perspective. I suggest that the marriage show is an outcome of merging the process of **framing**, which ensures the appropriateness of candidates, with **unpredictability**, as a generic convention of the reality show genre (Skeggs and Wood 2012). This produces leakages; that is, instances, narratives and subjects who subvert what is sought to be maintained through the framing process: a young woman below the

acceptable marriage age, pre-marital pregnancy, the revelation of an informal religious marriage contract, etc. are far from rare occurrences, occupying a great deal of the program flow. I will handle what kind of stories *leak into* the flow of the show, and how the flow of the show entails leakages in Chapter 7.

On the whole, my aim in this chapter is to give an extensive account of the production process, with a particular focus on the normative negotiations that mould candidates into marriageable subjects and move them across different stages of participation and matchmaking. In order to answer these questions, I pursue the pathway the female candidates travel on the way to the stage, and their moments of encounter with production staff. At the beginning of my research and during my first field visits, my impression was that everybody knew their place and role in the studio. I felt that everybody had a pre-established space in the building except me. Everyone from the candidates and the studio audiences to the staff were moving according to the routine of the show. Gradually, I realised that a huge part of the production process involved the recruitment of newcomers into the process, and into the routine within the studio building by the production staff. It is necessary to underline that I pursued the female candidate pathway because I was also moving within the space of the studio as a woman (see Chapter 3 for a detailed account on my research pathway). I will refer in this chapter to the staff's accounts of these negotiations and the female candidates' reflections on their participation in order to show how the frames are actively constructed and enacted during their encounters, and with the pace and intensity of the production process.

6.1 Calling the Show

The journey of a candidate to the show starts with a phone call. As I described in Chapters 4-5, the decision to make the first call entails delicate negotiations between prospective candidates and their families, sometimes including encouragement of the reluctant or shy. Following a telephone interview with staff, those deemed authentic are

invited to the studio for additional screening. Hence, the conversation between caller and staff is the first moment of selection and involves reciprocal judgements: staff want to trust callers and callers want to feel comfortable participating in the show.

Therefore, the call centre is the first frame to be transgressed. It is a small room where six young staff members field hundreds of phone calls per day, many of which have nothing to do with getting married on the show. During my visits, I spent time in the call centre and listened the staff's conversations with callers. Erkan, the call centre coordinator, told me they received calls from people who simply wanted to chat with the staff, or who desperately hoped to say hello to Esra Erol, as well as those who hoped their calls would make it on the air so they could solicit charity during the broadcast. Erkan seemed proud that the call centre staff were appreciated enough that viewers would call just to chat with them about their everyday miseries. He was also impressed with the calls they received from victims of the Van Earthquake asking for help and support: *'Some were even calling while the shaking was still going on'. 'We diverted their calls to Kızılay'*, he noted. Indeed the example of the earthquake is indicative of the significance of the show in the viewers' lives, and the key role of the call centre in connecting those lives to the production routine of the show. What was at stake in his account of the call centre was a feeling of urgency on the one hand, and mundaneness and intimacy between callers and staff on the other. Indeed, the small windowless room of the call centre ironically functioned as a window for those who want to be connected to the show that gave them so much pleasure on their TV screens.

As a researcher, I enjoyed the time I spent in the call centre, which was a very lively research environment. Though I could not hear the voices of the callers, I had a good idea of the content of conversations based on the staff's sides of the interaction:

- *Do you have the consent of your family?*
- *You're 14 years younger [than the candidate you called about]. Aren't you afraid?*

- *Why do you want to be connected to the show?*
- *Watch the show every day. I am sure that you'll find someone suitable for you.*
- *Have you participated in another show before?*
- *We invite you to the show with your mother, if possible.*
- *Did you make a religious marriage contract or a civil one in your previous marriage?*
- *You'll come to the Esenler Coach Station, and we'll welcome you there.*
- *Ok, I'll tell the orchestra that all they need is a kanun! [a musical instrument]*

I tried to catch and make note of the myriad of questions and statements as they flew through the room. As some of the sample sentences above demonstrate, the staff ask several identifying questions to callers. Erkan, who is responsible for the call centre, and who decides which calls will be connected to the broadcast, describes their work as follows:

They call during the live broadcast either as suitors or because they want to be on the show [as candidates]. We connect some of the calls to the live broadcast, if we trust and believe them, and invite others onto the show. Then our colleagues, other staff members, evaluate the invited suitors and prepare them for the show. Finally, they are introduced to the candidates.

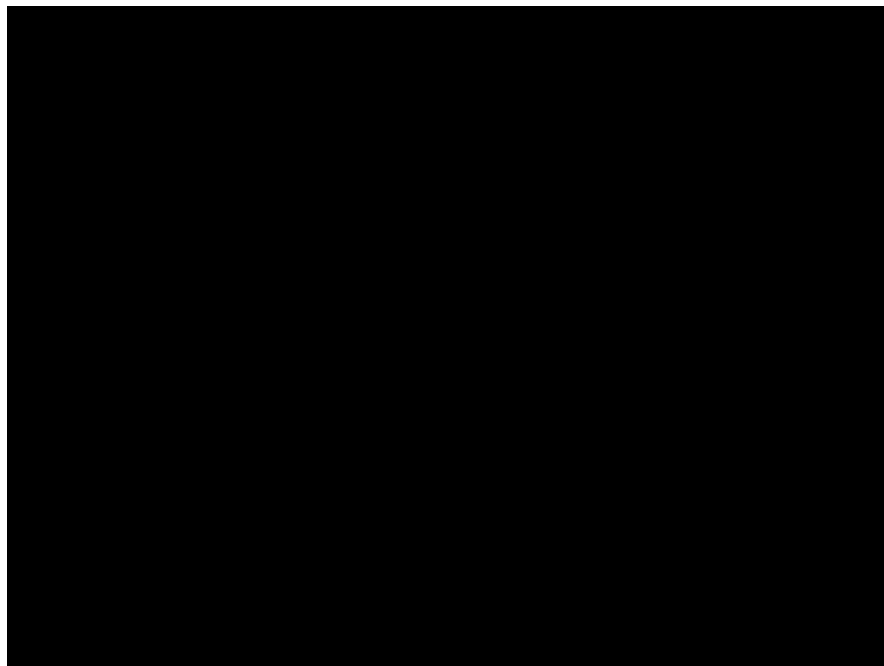


Figure 6-1: *The call centre in 2012. Six staff members were working at the centre at the time of the research, headed by Erkan, the call centre coordinator*

Erkan deploys trust as the main principle for selecting candidates, which is common at the entry level of the production process for both staff and candidates (for the candidates' side, see Chapter 4). At this level of trust, he points to the *authenticity* of the caller as the basic criterion of selection. They first have to eliminate prank callers and invite those who they are convinced are suitable candidates/suitors to the studio, or connect their calls to the live broadcast. Like all other reality show formats, as Grindstaff points out, the marriage show is expected to provide 'visual *evidence* of real life' (2002: 59, emphasis added). Evidence of the real in the marriage show lies in the authenticity of the participants: that those who participate are *serious* about getting married, and that those who call are *serious* about wanting to enter a matchmaking process with the candidate. Trust in the authenticity of the caller as a candidate, a suitor, or a commentator is essential since once they are connected to the live broadcast there is no way to control what is said. When I ask Erkan to elaborate on what he means by trust, he replies,

For example, sometimes they don't tell us that they don't like a candidate and speak very nicely about him/her; then they may reveal this during live broadcast. This is offensive to the candidates because they get on the stage very timidly and we have to consider their situation. This is what I mean by trust, otherwise there is no other kind of distrust. But we try to be much more careful about those to be connected to the live broadcast. And we do this through our questions, long conversations. I mean, I do one-on-one interviews, then send those I trust to the control room and they connect them to the live broadcast.

I would like to unpack how trust operates in Erkan's account. Firstly, the register of trust points to a concern on the staff's part to prevent bad surprises during the live broadcast. They try to reduce unpredictability for themselves and for the candidates, so they seek consistency between what is told over the phone and on the live call. Indeed, as he states, they cannot fully control what will happen on the stage, and the occasional prank caller, or a caller who wants to offend or embarrass the candidate on stage, does slip through their screening process and into the frame of the show. On the other hand, I

argue that trust is not only about checking the caller's *authenticity* (that she/he is not a prank caller) and *reliability* (that she/he will not offend anyone). I suggest the point behind their diligence in assessing calls is that they are responsible not only for allowing callers into the human flow of the show, but for granting them a place in the human circuit of marriage as a candidate, a suitor or a commentator/mediator. Therefore, embedded in the caller's authenticity and reliability is a more general question of who gets to marry on the show, which in turn opens up a space for normative negotiations with which the show is endowed as a pathway to marriage.

Within this framework, in the following section, I describe the main function of the call centre: candidate selection. How do staff allow candidates into the flow of the show from the moment of their first call? My focus is mainly on the staff's account of young female candidates since they are central to Erkan's description of the process. It was no coincidence that he chose the example of young female candidates; the normative negotiations that take place at the call centre mainly stemmed from a tension between callers who derived a sense of self through watching the show and the staff charged with maintaining limits on that sense of self, which is particularly relevant for female candidates. Thus, as I will show in the next section, the candidate is never conceived as an individual responsible for her own actions; rather, she steps into an already established position among the conventions of the matchmaking processes. What is striking is that all these negotiations between different normativities and the tensions between different aspects of female subjectivity take place in the intense space and pace of the call centre.

6.1.1 *Candidate Selection: Family Involvement*

The staff ask callers several questions, like where they are calling from, how old they are and whether they have been previously married. Those who sound too young are asked whether their parents are aware they are calling, and those who have been married are asked about those marriages. Indeed, the question of age, which Esra Erol also

addressed in the earlier quote, is of particular significance, being thought of as the first and foremost criterion for the selection of suitable candidates. Erkan's quote below also demonstrates how staff deploy norms of marriageability in the candidate selection process, beginning with age:

Even if they are over 18 [the legal age limit for marriage without family consent], we do not accept women under 25 without the consent of their families. Why? Because men and women under 25 can't fully adapt to the live broadcast because their minds remain preoccupied with their families. There is already an excitement about the live broadcast, and we don't think the matchmaking process can go smoothly without family consent. That's why I need to talk to at least one of the family members.

Accordingly, he gives an example of how they test trustworthiness and catch inconsistencies in callers' self-narrations:

For example she says 'I am 25, I am over 18 so I don't need my family's consent'; that's how she blurts out that her family didn't give consent.

Erkan puts the emphasis on the candidate's excitement and argues that the reason they seek family consent is to prevent failures that might occur on stage resulting from the excitement of being on live television. However, he also reveals that they seek family involvement in the case of younger candidates – those who are legally adults but socially thought not to be fully 'independent' of their families yet – in order to ensure the matchmaking process goes smoothly. Thus, the concern is to ensure the show does not violate marriage/matchmaking conventions, by encouraging family involvement. The marriage age policy, from this vantage point, empowers families and enables staff and other subjects to register the show as a safe and suitable pathway to marriage.

Nevertheless, it seems initially contradictory within the marriage show format to search for an acceptable age limit to promote individual decision when the format is based on individual choice and an attraction between candidates and suitors which could

possibly end in love. On the other hand, I would like to repeat my main argument that the producers register the show as a safe and proper pathway to marriage by bringing together the conventions of the televisual format with the conventions matchmaking and mating. Then, how do these sets of conventions function together – how does the show operate efficiently if it is obligated to consider so many subject perspectives? I argue that the answer resides in the filter they use for eliminating young candidates, as Erkan puts it. He says that they do not permit 17-year-old candidates (the legal age for marriage with family consent, though not the legal age of adulthood) on the show at all, and ask for family consent up to age 25.²² I suggest that the gap between the legal limit and the show's limit indicates a difficulty in resolving the problem of individual decision. At any age, marriage is a collaborative and complicated formula of love, individual decision/choice, and the social norms that promote certain forms of marriage, within which the family is central (Tekçe 2004). In my discussion of female candidates' narratives of their decisions to come on the show, I demonstrate the multiple ways women of different ages and social backgrounds narrate their decisions to get married in general, and to marry on the marriage show in particular, within the confines of their social position, their familial relationships, their age and their desires, which only occasionally occurs on individualistic terms (see Chapters 4-5). Within this framework, I suggest that there is no clearcut acceptable age limit at which women are recognised as making individualistic decisions about their lives. What I would like to argue here is that age is one among many factors through which marriage is discussed above and outside the sphere of individual desire on the one hand, and individual choice on the other, such that it is the first example that trips off Erkan's tongue while defining the work of candidate selection.

²² According to the Article 124 of the New Turkish Civil Code, which was amended in 2002, one cannot marry without the family's consent before the age of 17. Under extraordinary circumstances, however, 16-year-olds may marry if the court decides that it is appropriate and necessary. (Turkish Civil Code numbered 4721 has been adopted on 22.11.2001).

Then on what terms is the marriage age debated at a larger scale? First of all, marriage age is an issue of primarily women's marriage age, and within Turkey it is debated in terms of cultivating the modern family and its subjects. More specifically, it is one of the norms to be negotiated in maintaining the right dose of modernisation, and yet there is no easy end to this negotiation. Accordingly, the work of selecting suitable candidates involves balancing the levels of tradition and modernity, i.e. the show is responsible for resolving the issues of how and to what extent so-called modern values should be deployed to prevent early marriage among women, and to what extent the families should be involved in the matchmaking process.

What resides between tradition and modernity as two poles of a range of norms is the subject of tense debate regarding women's marriage age. Within modernist discourses, the issue is confined to forced early marriage. More specifically, the issue is framed as 'the child bride problem', especially by human rights activists, by some feminists groups, and state institutions. Though the ways they address the issue vary, these groups and actors predominantly register forced early marriage as a problem of *backwardness* in Turkey.²³ It is crucial to underline that the feminist movement in Turkey takes a hard stance against the issue as a form of violence against women, early forced marriage is still predominantly discussed as a result of excessive traditionalism and backwardness. In addition, it is no coincidence that those who are registered as backward are those who were formerly excluded from the hegemonic representations of proper national subjects on state television (Chapter 2). Namely, backwardness is

²³ It is crucial to emphasise that the feminist movement in Turkey successfully broke the silence against domestic violence after the 1980s, and has gradually built up a powerful feminist discourse and action especially against women's killings, forced marriages, forced early marriages and domestic violence and rape, pressuring the state to take action (Işık 2002). Feminist groups and their initiatives draw attention to scandalous trial processes and poor state policies in Turkey, in order to emphasise the state's role in legitimising and supporting sexual crimes by almost forming alliances with perpetrators. Here, I refer to alliances such as the generosity of Turkish legal institutions to reduce sentences on the basis of good conduct in cases concerning sexual crimes. For detailed accounts of trial processes and feminist statements against them in Turkey, see <http://sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/>

regarded as the problem of Kurds on the one hand, and religious Muslims who exceed the state's official representations and limits to Islamic practice and public appearance on the other. The official discourse and accompanying media representations usually frame the issue as a problem of the Kurdish populations. Popular representations of Kurdish people as perpetrators of forced marriage in general and forced early marriage in particular – which accordingly tend to take the form of stories featuring Kurdish women as victims on television serials – are examples of this kind of framing (Sirman 2007).

In a similar manner, progressive leftist and feminist political discourses can easily accuse those who lead religious lifestyles, especially as part of their opposition to the conservative Ak Parti (Justice and Development Party) government. For example, Abdullah Gül, the 11th president of Turkey, who was elected with the support of the Ak Parti government, and who is publicly known as the first president married to a woman who wears a headscarf, has been criticised for his religious identity, often with an emphasis on his wife's young age (15) at the time of marriage. After her husband's election, some feminists and other secular progressive groups initiated a heated discussion on First Lady Hayrünnisa Gül's marriage age, arguing that this case indicated the attitude of the Ak Parti government towards women. At a larger scale, they warned that the government would soon begin to support early marriage for women as part of its hidden Islamist agenda. As seen in this example, the merging of religiosity with the policies of the Ak Parti government easily assimilated feminists' warnings into a discriminatory account against religiosity.

Thus the public voices usually point to excessive traditionalism and religiosity, which accuse Kurdish people on the one hand, and Islamists/religious Muslims on the other hand, for practicing and promoting forced early marriage. Blame for the problem is reduced to ethnic and/or religious identity, and as such backwardness and deviance from modern secular practices of marriage, rather than being regarded as part of a larger system

of control over women's bodies and lives at every level of society. Although the gender aspect of the issue seems to be addressed, by framing it as a women's problem, women who are married/forced to marry at a very young age are stigmatised for their religious and ethnic identity, instead of addressing the *real* consequences of early marriage on their lives, while despising the possible *normality* of such marriages in women's own lives at the time of their marriage, and under their life conditions.

Indeed Esra Erol herself is very much involved in the debate, first and foremost because she has observed the devastating consequences of forced early marriage for women. So she wrote a book, as she put it, on 'the child bride issue', titled *Sessiz Kadınlar* (Women without Voices) in 2012. She collected the life stories of thirteen female candidates who had been forced to marry at an early age, and had been exposed to domestic violence and rape during their marriages. Among all the debates and tensions that the issue of forced early marriage entails, Esra Erol's testimonial on the issue, as someone who has listened to hundreds of life stories, is valuable. However, the book frames the issue in a sensational and victimising fashion consistent with the discourses on 'child brides'.²⁴

Thus, the staff seek to maintain an age limit to prevent the show from promoting excessively traditional and backward values at the discursive level. At a larger scale, on the other hand, they complicate this limit by encouraging subjects to make the decision to come to the show, and to decide to marry on the show, thereby – as I argue throughout the dissertation – opening up a space for the self. My argument is that marriage age is instrumental in drawing limits on this space. Thus they extend the official limit of 18 up to the 25 for asking the family consent, in order to draw limits on self-decision and comply with established matchmaking processes.

²⁴ I also wrote a commentary on the book at the request of Esra Erol. I provide a detailed account of my decision-making process following her request in Chapter 3.

It is also crucial to note here that, as I argued above, there is no clearcut limit beyond which women can act and decide on behalf of themselves, since marriage itself is *regarded* and *lived* as a prominent decision that affects and shapes familial relationships, the couple's social status, the social hierarchies within the nation, and the nation itself at a larger scale, i.e. a serious decision which cannot be left to individuals among limitless possibilities of desires, choices and expectations.

Thus, my argument is that, while staff are concerned with maintaining an age limit which corresponds to a normative scale between excessive traditionalism and modernisation – modern enough to avoid promoting early marriage, and traditional enough to avoid encouraging (young) women to make individualistic decisions about marriage, they also draw a limit on subjects to decide and act on their own behalf in response to the show's call *to do something for themselves* (see Chapter 5). As I observed at the beginning of the section, it is not a coincidence that Erkan places a particular emphasis on female candidates when drawing the proper age limit for this kind of decision. Thus, women's ages become an entry point for family involvement on women's paths to marriage through the show. Negotiations between staff and candidate become integrated into negotiations between individuals and their families in the case of female candidates.

When family members enter the negotiation process they become actors in the matchmaking process. At this point the register of trust, previously employed by staff to evaluate the reliability of the caller, becomes an important factor in families' evaluations of the show as a safe and reliable path to marriage for the potential candidate. The process here resembles Grindstaff's account of talk show staff's efforts to engender the trust of guests using personal relations. The most successful mechanism for securing the participation and compliance of guests is, she states, 'not to deceive, bribe, cajole, or threaten them but to establish a trusting relationship, albeit a short-lived one' (2002: 110).

Likewise, trust is a form of intimacy that marriage show staff seek to establish with candidates, for what is typically a short period but could also be longer depending on candidates' *fortunes* on the show. This is very similar to Erkan's account of convincing candidates or their parents to participate:

No, we say, we at least have to ask why they don't approve of her participation. Most families accept after we talk to them. For example, when we ask, 'why do you feel uneasy', they say 'they will think that our daughter couldn't marry outside, so she went to the marriage show'. And I say, don't think she will marry immediately after coming here, the lady who comes here first meets Esra hanım and then just says hello to, say, Abdullah Bey. I mean just look at him to see if he is someone with whom you can look out of the same window for your whole life, and then say hello, then let the families get to know each other, which may take two months or a whole year, nobody knows. We just bring them together just as their neighbours Safiye or Kadriye hanım do.

Erkan clearly aligns the stages of the program with a usual marriage arrangement: the meeting, the prospective couple assessing each other in terms of '*looking out of the same window for life*', and finally the families' involvement in the process of marriage. He says that their role is like that of a conventional matchmaker. The point that Erkan uncovers here is that the candidates hesitate to participate in the show because it is apparently different from the outside (i.e. the outside the show, conventional forms of matchmaking): the show's emphasis on the self, and its presupposition that the decision to contact the show was made by an individual, may have jeopardised the families' trust in the show. He compensates for this danger by drawing an analogy between the show and the conventions of matchmaking. As families are implicated in the negotiation process, familial norms are articulated in his analogy. In this way, I suggest, he secures the show's legitimacy as a pathway to marriage, while drawing a limit on individual decision, and bringing the family into the process.

Erkan's observation about candidates' hesitancy is remarkable in relation to candidates' comparisons of the show to the outside. As I maintain in Chapter 4, female candidates both express their hesitancy about the show because it is different from the outside, and simultaneously express their trust in it on the same grounds: because it is different from outside, and the show's processes and procedures elicit trust for them. Far from being contradictory, this example clearly shows how the frames of the show are drawn through subtle negotiations between conventions of matchmaking and the marriage show as a new pathway to marriage. Their feeling of trust is enhanced with the consent of the families, which, at a larger scale, makes their movement into the show 'morally acceptable' and thus, as *safe* (Tekçe 2004). In her study on pathways to marriage in contemporary Istanbul, Belgin Tekçe points to the case of a premarital pregnancy in one of the women's narratives about her marriage. Specifically, she points out how family involvement worked in the case of a premarital pregnancy, which is indeed a transgression of a very critical norm according to the conventions of marriage. Her argument is that the success of this case is because her family supported and took a role in their daughter's marriage to her boyfriend after they found out she was pregnant. Tekçe argues that, besides resolving a conflict and protecting the honour of their daughter and themselves, their involvement was 'key to constructing a morally acceptable life course for the self' (2004: 184). Indeed this is exactly how family involvement works for the young female candidates on the show. Because it provides a path for the families to become involved in the matchmaking process, it is also trusted by candidates more than the outside. They move into the flow of the show not only because it addresses their concerns about trust and safety in specific ways, but also because it is endowed with the conventions of matchmaking and draws safe limits on the self by encouraging family participation in the process.

I would like to emphasise that I outline the prevailing norms as expressed by Erkan as my tape recorder rolls. What is crucial here is that all the normative negotiations are done spontaneously during the call, just as Erkan spontaneously addresses them during my interview with him. While recounting the process of answering phone calls, he stresses that ‘there are no definitive criteria’ for selecting candidates. He adds that the work of selection itself is only learned by doing:

We try to understand them from what they say; I cannot specify a particular criterion for understanding them. That’s why I tell our new employees from staff that they can only learn the call centre by working here. And later when they see how new friends, are when they first come they ask ‘were we like this, Erkan abi [a Turkish word for elder brother, or a respected elder friend]?’ And I say [a smile in his face] ‘yes, you were’.

Indeed everything is ambiguous and unpredictable at the moment a call comes in: who is she, what does she have to say, what will the staff ask, how will she respond, and what will the final decision of each party be? As in the case of Erkan’s example of marriage age, trust is the foundation on which candidates and staff negotiate norms and work to mitigate conflicts/ambiguities/hesitancies. The candidates may move into, or remain out of the flow for many reasons (for example for not being at an *acceptable* age to get married), which are all composed within a single frame which is drawn on the basis of trust in Erkan’s account (for example lying about their age). Equally, the candidate may change her mind and decide not to participate, if she (or her family) does not find the staff trustworthy enough.

As I have tried to depict, the call centre is an important part of the production process, where the first step in composing the frame is candidate recruitment and selection. Another frame extends around the self: what will she decide and to what extent will she be responsible for her decision? This is also what makes the marriage show a successful television show and a legitimate, acceptable pathway to marriage for audiences

in Turkey: it negotiates the *limits* of the self, between an emphasis on decision and responsibility, and a national imaginary of family involvement in the process of matchmaking even from the very first moment, in the very small room, through very short phone calls.

6.1.2 Refutation Calls: Secrets Revealed

Another function of the call centre within the marriage show format is fielding calls from those who want to share information about the candidates. Usually, they call to contradict inconsistencies in a candidate's or suitor's story as told on stage, for example, a lie or an important omission which could affect the outcome of the show, i.e. the candidate's decision about a suitor. If the staff are convinced of the authenticity of the caller and trust the refutation, the call is connected to the live broadcast. This scoop – reminiscent of Grindstaff's (2002) use of the term *money shot* – brings some excitement to the broadcast. In addition, these calls serve as a second line of defence after the initial screening by program staff, which supports the show's reputation as a safe pathway to marriage, like all other moments of framing. The reliability of the show is maintained not only through selecting proper candidates, but also it openly, publicly exhibits its failures; that is, when their frames fail to keep that which is inappropriate off the screen. The policy of transparency represented by what I call the refutation call is a tool of the show's reliability and a source of trust for prospective candidates.

Erkan describes the live call as a conventional form of scrutinising the candidate's trustworthiness, which normally keeps the candidate on stage and in the human flow of the show:

Esra hanım's principles are so thorough – trust, I mean. If she trusts him/her and if the candidate really wants to get married we support him/her as much as possible. But if their lies is revealed even though we insisted on asking before, we think that the candidate takes the risk of being disgraced. For example, you're married by religious contract and you think that nobody will call and refute this to

to 70 million viewers. We get shocked in those cases. And if we prove that it is true, for example if İbrahim bey is married by religious contract and if the caller knows İbrahim bey very well – if they know İbrahim bey's surname, about his childhood, etc. – we connect them to the show. It usually turns out to be true.

Indeed many types of lies may be revealed during the live show: the family members of one candidate, whom she had claimed had all been killed in an earthquake, were indeed alive, for example, and many others have been revealed to have lied about having been previously married, or to have failed to reveal problems with their former spouses, their children, their financial situations, etc. Among all these, the example Erkan chooses to cite is that of the religious marriage that is hidden from staff. Since a religious marriage is not legally recognised and therefore not listed on the national ID card, staff cannot prove whether someone is or is not married by religious ceremony alone. This makes it relatively easy for the prospective candidate to make it past the initial screening onto the stage and announce a desire to marry.

The dramatic reaction of the audience when a religious marriage is revealed on the show is akin to the moment of capturing a *money shot*, making it an obvious example for Erkan to cite. Indeed such revelations are not uncommon. What also makes the religious contract a *problem* is that it is one of the public issues inherent to the formulation of proper marriage in the crafting of the nation. When the Civil Code of the new republican regime was enacted in 1926, civil marriage became the only legitimate form of marriage contract. A religious contract can officially take place only after a civil ceremony. However, as I maintained in Chapter 4, around three percent of marriages in Turkey are identified as having been established by religious contract only, according to the Survey of the Family Structure in Turkey (Türkiye’de Aile Yapısı Araştırması, 2011). Though this is already a significant percentage, I suspect the number is underreported, since religious marriage can also be hidden from public life for various reasons. It is not

uncommon for female candidates to tell of being ‘sold’ to men by their families into religious marriages which are neither registered nor publicly announced (see Chapter 7). In addition, religious marriage is an avenue by which men have been known to take a second wife, which can be easily hidden from the first wife. In other words, there is plenty of motive and opportunity for underreporting religious marriage to official surveys.

This is the main reason why Erkan underlines the revelation of hidden religious marriages on the show through refutation calls. As I argue in Chapter 4, female candidates explained that they trust in the show *because* there are mechanisms in place for getting such secrets revealed: secrecy around marriage forms that exceed the bounds of the official discourse on civil marriage may be revealed, such as religious marriage. Within this framework, the revelation is not fundamentally about uncovering a lie on the stage; more than that, it is uncovering one’s guilt over the backwardness and corruption of the modern secular ideals of the nuclear family (as discussed in Chapter 1), as well as bringing forward the issue of widespread sexual and emotional abuse of women for public debate. As I maintain throughout the dissertation, the show maintains the limits of self-narration by enabling candidates to hide certain parts of their life stories. On the other hand, it has a normative scale with which to draw that frame into self-narration. Revealing a secret considered to be inappropriately held, then, is an example of the delicate work of the moral judgement involved in framing the selves on the show.

6.1 Entering the Studio

After being invited to the show, candidates come to the ATV studios located in Yenibosna, Istanbul. The studio building is the second frame to be transgressed through a security control. Indeed the procedures for entry to the building are reminiscent of a border. Security outside the building, who are given a list of expected guests each day, control entry into both the building and parking lot. Security staff take down the national ID numbers of each guest before entry, and no vehicles are permitted to enter the parking

lot except staff members' cars and the shuttle buses carrying candidates. Every bag, gift for the host, and bouquet of flowers is also scanned in the border-crossing-like passage from one state (of being), to another one.

The studio is a two-storey building with a large foyer area. Three reality show studios and the control room open to the foyer downstairs; the production, call-centre, editing and meeting rooms, the host's room, and the dressing rooms (changing, hairdressing and make-up rooms for female candidates) are upstairs. Only staff and female candidates, accompanied by a staff member, have access to the upstairs rooms. Female candidates are prepared for the show and kept separate from the male candidates there; they meet on stage or in other public areas of the building such as the foyer, and only for short intervals.

Three small rooms behind the stage are used as the host's, the female candidates' and the male candidates' backstage spaces. Each room has its own door to the stage, and male and female candidates never see each other before or during the broadcast, neither does the host see any candidates or suitors before they come on stage. Regulation of candidates' movement throughout the participation process is an important task, which not only includes accompanying female candidates from the dressing room to the hair and makeup rooms, and so on, but also sequestering male candidates while female candidates pass back and forth in front of their backstage room. Male and female guests also take turns being accompanied to the toilets and to the designated outdoor smoking areas during commercial breaks.



Figure 6-2: The main gate of the studio building



Figure 6-3: The studio building



Figure 6-4: Foyer

The division of the space into two homosocial sites is ‘a necessity of the format’, as staff members very often put it. Candidates and the suitors should not see each other before the folding screen opens with joy and excitement (see section 6.4.3). Nevertheless, the *necessity* of the format also suits a norm: the men and women who come to the show to get married meet only in view of the public. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, female candidates very often emphasise that they feel safe in the space of the studio because they do not see male candidates backstage.

After entering the building, new candidates are welcomed by the guest coordinators. This is the first face-to-face encounter between staff and candidates. Coordinators implement a set of filters at this point; candidates (and suitors) who are selected as suitable participants for the show are also registered as marriageable subjects. The moment of selection in the studio thus becomes one of the most carefully crafted frames of the marriage show format, through which a variety of norms involving marriage/matchmaking are merged within the format’s conventions. According to Ahu, the guest coordinator, filters are applied at three levels in the selection process, which I will unpack through his narration.

At the first level, those who have previously appeared on another TV show are eliminated. That is, they try to select new faces for the show, who viewers will read as having come from ordinary life rather than from another television studio. Like with the first phone calls, this is also an issue of authenticity, and thus trust/reliability. As Ahu explained it, *‘It feels fake, I mean we don’t want to lose people’s trust’*. Eliminating prospective candidates who have previously appeared on television also helps avoid the impression that they are casting participants. In our conversations, almost all of the staff emphasise that there is no casting in the program. Those who are already part of the human circuit of reality television are kept out of frame for this reason. The effect of ordinariness is created through the selection of new faces for the show.

In Chapter 2, I traced the question ‘*Is it for real?*’, which I argue is posed pejoratively in reaction to the presence of the masses on television, who had exceeded the bounds of the state-formulated representation of proper national subjecthood. The staff’s endeavour to highlight candidate authenticity can be understood from this standpoint. I argue that judgements about the realness of the marriage show have specific implications in the Turkish context where *the represented* had been habitually equated to *the real* on state television (see Chapter 2). From this vantage point, I would like to reiterate that the show is an endeavour to narrow this gap, and to register the ordinary lives of the formerly excluded masses as *real* by focusing on authenticity in the selection process. In addition to this, as I try to maintain in this chapter, the assessment of candidate authenticity becomes much fiercer on a show whose goal is binding participants together for life. Thus, subtle frames are needed to render candidates as marriageable subjects, which I unpack in the following sections.

6.1.1 The First Encounter: Liveable lives

After filtering out those who have already appeared on television, the remaining candidates are assessed according to their basic standard of living. Ahu describes this level of selection as follows:

There may be unsuitable candidates. I mean alcoholics, or those whose lives are not compatible with being married, who have mental health problems, no place to live, nothing. Not ready to marry in any way. We send them back to their families somehow. Or call relevant services.

As Ahu demonstrates, they assess candidates’ health and well-being at this level of selection. A frame is drawn between having or not having a life worthy of showing and narrating on television. This also helps to narrow the field of marriageable candidates from others. Thus, they seek visible signs of a minimum quality of mental health, decent living conditions, cleanliness, and a space to live, when screening candidates for entry into the human flow of the marriage show, and hence into the human circuit of marriage.

In their study on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, a charity show produced and consumed in the US, Oullette & Hay (2008) observe that participants in the show are usually homeowners, and thus those who are able to care for themselves ‘to some extent’, as good and responsible citizens, though who have fallen on difficult times in ‘extraordinary situations’. The marriage show criteria of minimum levels of mental health and general well-being can be considered a similar type of filter. My argument is that by establishing parameters for minimum mental health and lifestyle the show is drawing a frame around those deemed worthy both of representation on television and of marriage. This is an enlarged subject frame that stands in contrast to the exclusive representation of ideal types that dominated representation during the state monopoly period of television broadcasting in Turkey. Nevertheless, the concern for maintaining the effect of *ordinariness* on the show, which extends the frame to everyday realities at the first level, is merged into a particular definition of a liveable life in Butler’s (2009) terms.

I would like to highlight a paradox here: the marriage show format reveals that those who do not have a *liveable* life are not allowed onto the human circuit of marriage, with criteria like physical appearance, health and living conditions ushering some into and keeping others out of frame. On the other hand, I suggest that not only are subjects’ familial relations the foremost form of relationship to an intimate other, they are also a precondition of access to other resources for health and propriety, such as the support of immediate or extended family, and of the state. Özar and Yakut-Cakar’s (2013) study on *women without men* illustrates the difficulties of coping with life for women who are divorced, widowed or deserted in Turkey. Özar and Yakut-Çakar maintain that the welfare system in Turkey targets the family with a male breadwinner as the default lifestyle. This kind of a welfare system excludes women from welfare benefits if they are not married to a man, given the low employment rates of women in Turkey. The gender-based discrimination of the welfare system in Turkey, according to Özar and Yakut-

Çakar, becomes more visible when women try to survive without the support of a man (husband, father, or any other close kin). Parallel to the material conditions of women's economic hardships, they also show how societal norms and values also encourage and empower the gender discrimination of the welfare regimes. The difficulty widowed or divorced women have in obtaining alimony, child support, or other familial benefits reveals how little room there is for women outside of marriage/family, although marriage is also a norm for men in Turkey. Their study provides grounds for understanding how coming to the marriage show can also be viewed as a means of survival especially for women, but also for men who are left alone in life and are thus deficient of the preconditions for a proper life.

Thus, in order to step onto the pathway to marriage offered by the show, potential candidates who are single, widowed, or divorced, have to prove their quality of life meets the levels generally associated with those who are married. So for example, as I maintained in Chapter 5, loneliness is a basis for female candidates' decisions to come to the show, and as shown here, a safe and proper register for asserting the self under these conditions as a lonely and therefore an incomplete/improper subject hoping to be completed within a socially approved form of intimacy.

If the frame draws a line between what counts as life and what does not, then what happens to those who fall outside the line according to the format's criteria? Ahu underlines that they do not simply drop those whose lives are deemed inappropriate or lacking. They either send them back to their families or refer them to a relevant social service. So there is a space for healing subjects whose lives are not counted as worthy of representation/narration. Ahu points to the state and the family as the *institutions* responsible for bringing a subject's quality of life up to a basic standard. Questions of whether the state really provides these services, or whether the candidates really have supportive families to return to, are outside the scope of this research but warrant further

investigation; we know from Özar and Yakut-Çakar's study, for example, that the welfare system is inadequate for meeting the needs of unmarried and deserted women. What is relevant here is that when the show excludes those whose standards of living do not meet minimum expectations they are also excluding these sorts of questions from the televised discourse. The show limits the registers of suffering it engages to the realm of the *personalistic*, such as personal suffering, desire and expectation. By excluding such questions, the show limits its target population and its offered services to a *juxtapolitical* domain (Berlant 2008). This is similar to the observation by Ouellette & Hay that, '*Home Edition* ... present[s] homeownership as an appropriate accomplishment that distinguishes the worthy poor from welfare recipients still caught in a cycle of dependency on the state' (2008: 45). This is the case for the marriage show as well, which both opens the television frame to everyday realities, and contains its own exclusionary mechanisms that keep out those who could potentially spoil the show's promise to handle every story in its particularity rather than tackling the issues at the systemic and political levels.

After being accepted into the human flow of the show, there is still a way to go between having a life and having a proper, worthy life as a desirable marriage candidate. The format is based on the assessment, judgement and, when possible, amelioration of subjects' troubles as they relate to the pursuit of a proper life through marriage. Yet, the attempt to get married also requires a level of propriety on the part of the subjects. Then, what are the criteria for propriety on the marriage show? I seek to answer this question in the following section.

6.1.2 *Denklik (Equivalence)*

After selecting suitable candidates, a new frame is drawn to determine who can meet with whom, i.e. who is an appropriate suitor for a candidate. The staff's task here is to decide whether the suitor meets the candidate's expectations or *criteria*. First it is

necessary to note here that *criteria* is a key concept for the marriage show. Basically, *criteria* is the common name for the expectations of candidates from potential suitors. The staff ask candidates for their criteria in advance, and they are announced several times during the broadcast. For example, Esra Erol announces the criteria of a male candidate as follows: ‘*He expects suitors between the age of 20 and 25 who don’t smoke or drink alcohol, and who don’t lie*’. The criteria may vary from physical appearance to financial situation, or from location of residence to marital history, or from characteristics such as kindness and trustworthiness to religious orientation and practice. All candidates have the chance to announce their criteria during the live broadcast in their own particular, personal way. Accordingly, candidates very often reject the suitors just by saying ‘*she/he did not fit my criteria*’, which is so conventional to the format that it does not require further explanation.

On the other hand, there is another related concept to criteria that comes from the conventions of matchmaking: *denklik*. *Denklik* can be translated into English as *equivalence*. Almost everybody who is familiar with mating and matchmaking processes in Turkey knows the proverb: ‘even drums play in equivalent tones’,²⁵ which best describes the norm of *denklik* with reference to the idea that one should wed her/his equivalent. The proverb is often used to assess a possible marriage arrangement/match, or to criticise a relationship as inappropriate. It is crucial to note here that *denklik* is quite different from *harmony*, which is usually used to assess the relationship between two independent individuals. It is obviously very different from *equality* as well, which refers to gender equality as advocated by feminists and thus which is widely conceived as a ‘threat’ to the family especially in the Turkish context. Tayyip Erdoğan, the 12th President of Turkey, has recently gone on record with his criticism of the idea of gender equality at a public meeting on the UN International Day for the elimination of violence against

²⁵ Turkish saying: ‘Davul bile dengi dengine çalar’.

women. The meeting was organised by The Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), which can be described as a government-backed women's organisation established by a group of women who are also members of Justice and Development Party (AK Parti), as well as women from Erdoğan's own family. Conflating the concept of equality with sameness, and building his argument on examples such as: '*You cannot make a mother who has to breastfeed her child equal to a man. You cannot make women do everything men do like the communist regimes did*',²⁶ Erdoğan reemphasised his idea that women are different from men by nature. He asserted that women's primary role in society is motherhood, bemoaning the fact that this is never acknowledged by feminists. Interestingly, what he suggested for women in the place of equality was *equivalence*, which can only be maintained within the family, and by fulfilling their role within the family, as mothers.

How, then, can one define *denklik*? First of all, *denklik* is a form of equivalence used for benchmarking the couple according to their social status at every level by other people – i.e. by family members, friends, and community – whose positions will also be affected by the marriage of the couple. It can be described as an *economy of personhood*, in the sense described by Skeggs and Wood: 'in which intimate bodies, parts and practices are opened out to evaluation and exploitation, generating what counts as worthwhile with value' (2012: 12). *Denklik* is a specific form of economy that enables the couple and people/community around them to assess their value relative to one another, and to investigate whether their economic, moral and relational *worthiness* can be converted into new forms of relational value, i.e. 'dispersal of value to others' (2012: 9) as members of a new family – for example, for women, as mothers.

²⁶ Dearden, Lizzie, 2014. Turkish President: 'Equality between men and women is against nature'. *The Independent* November 24, 2014 [online]. Available from: www.independent.co.uk [accessed 15 December, 2014].

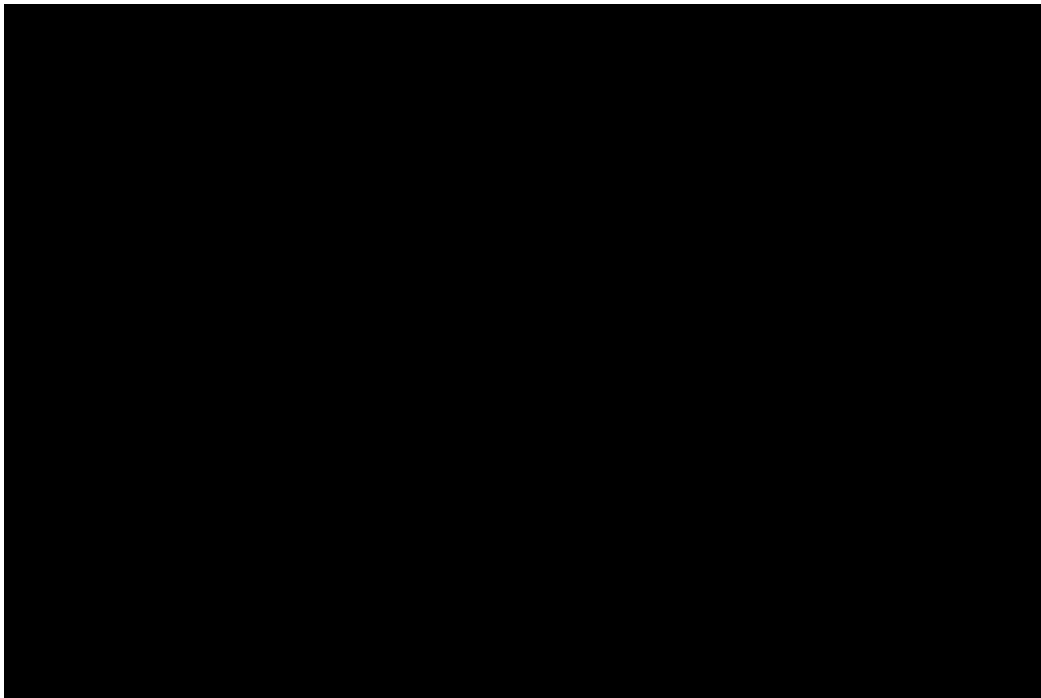


Figure 6-5: *Esra Erol announces a candidate's criteria: 'He lives in ... with his family. They're seven siblings. He is a 25-year-old hairdresser. He wants to pursue a good career in his job. He doesn't smoke or drink alcohol. He says that he likes working out, and he thinks that he is a sympathetic person. He expects suitors between the age of 20 and 25 who don't smoke or drink alcohol, and who do not lie' (Teaser, 10.01.2013)*

It is crucial to remember here that the show allows and encourages family involvement as a key factor in a successful matchmaking process. *Denklik* is one and a predominant theme through which families become involved in the matchmaking process. As well as being responsible for benchmarking the bride and groom as their future relatives (sons/daughters-in-law), families are also benchmarked and judged according to their economic and moral worth because they will take on new positions and new relations through the marriage. The wealth and morality of the families are benchmarked in order to assess the equivalence of the couple because, first of all, the couple's marriage will be another source of economic and moral value for them. Thus, they should not be superior/inferior to each other, but equivalent in such a way that the marriage of their children may add up to their capacities to accrue and extract value for themselves (economic, moral and social worth). Second, their worthiness is also crucial for the new couple and their future children. Considering that they will also acquire positions as mothers-/fathers-in-law, as grandmothers/fathers, as close relatives of the new family and their children, they will be responsible for the propriety of the new family, and the economic sustenance, moral development and social position of their future children.

Another aspect of *denklik* in conventional matchmaking processes, as well as being a tool for benchmarking, is that it is sought to be neatly maintained by the bride and groom, and their families after the matchmaking process has been initiated. The exchange of valuable gifts, the organisation of reciprocal visits and feasts are widespread rituals of marriage arrangement. Hart's (2007) study on marriage arrangements in two western Anatolian villages illustrates these processes.

Finally, *denklik* denotes a gender regime. Different values are attributed to men and women within the bond of marriage: the bride's wealth, beauty, youthfulness,

respectability, honour, education are weighed in special ways with respect to the groom's wealth, handsomeness, age, education, social status, and so on. These different sources of value may vary according to different locations and cultures within Turkey. Yet, there is a norm that is common to nearly all places, cultures and levels of society: the man's side can/should show a certain level of superiority over the woman's side. Thus, *denklik* is the knowledge that a groom can/should be older and wealthier than the bride, and the bride should also show that her value corresponds to the groom's value. One criterion for the bride's value is that she demonstrate she will remain *one step behind* the groom: she cannot be superior, but neither should she be overly inferior to the groom. Therefore, *denklik* is a special form of knowledge that reminds women and men of their place within marriage, and thus within the nation.

It is crucial to underline that the modern Turkish family is formulated as a *unit* of living and as an ideal form of intimacy for national subjects who are related to each other on the basis of love and care (Sirman 2005). In this respect, the idealised formula of the modern nuclear family discursively keeps all other hierarchies and dependencies out of the hegemonic and official representation of the family, locating men and women within an affective economy of responsibilities that are only for each other and for their children. Thus, men and women should know their place within the family, while excluding all other responsibilities based on class, ethnicity and kinship. Yet, Sirman also states that all these structures and relationships, such as different forms of extended family relations and other forms of intimacy, are part and parcel of the nuclear family as the ideal and privileged form of intimacy; however, they are excluded from hegemonic representations of the nuclear family as its *secrets* (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4). I suggest that *denklik* is one way of inserting these structures and relationships into the family, no matter to what extent the couple embraces the modern nuclear family as the ideal. So for example, benchmarking the new couple in terms of their education, class, and their families' social

status, etc. can easily be concealed under the rubric of *denklik* at any point on the rural-urban, upper-lower class, religious-secular continuum.

How does *denklik* work within the marriage show as a pathway to marriage then? I suggest that *criteria*, with *denklik*, form another site of convergence that imbues the frames of the show with the norms of marriage-matchmaking. Above all, the juxtaposition here is between the individual's desires and expectations based on a self-assessment, and on the gender, social capital and social position that she/he inhabits. In other words, *denklik* as a conventional benchmarking tool for matchmaking processes works as a *limit* to the self within a regime of *equivalence*, which positions men and women in relation to each other in a system involving unequal conduct. The program has to resolve the conflict among a range of possibilities in such a way that their desires can be expressed individualistically, while the broader realm of social normativity, which presupposes *denklik*, limits desire and its expression.

I trace how *denklik* as a norm of matchmaking is sought to be maintained in the show below. I will first take on the guest coordinator Ahu's account of how staff use candidates' expectations to assess suitors' equivalence. She provides some examples of the process by which suitors are eliminated:

For example, the woman says 'I am looking for a man with no kids', and if the man has kids, we eliminate him. Or a woman who has been married twice comes but if the man expects a woman who hasn't been married before, we eliminate her. We don't want people to be offended here because people may be offended to meet suitors who are obviously not equivalent in some respect. This is the most important principle: not to offend anyone. This is very important. You probably noticed it here as well.

As Ahu states, they let the suitors into the flow of the show only if they meet the criteria of the candidates. Suitors who do not meet these criteria are eliminated so as not to offend the candidate. To some extent, this concern not to offend can be understood in relation to Grindstaff's argument on offensiveness in the talk show. She observes that the

talk show genre is based on exploiting the emotional revelations of the guest with the expectation of eliciting the ‘money shot’; that is when they ‘ “get down and dirty” and “bare it all” for the pleasure, fascination, or repulsion of viewers’ (2002: 20). She argues that the talk show genre is denigrated by middle-class viewers and intellectuals in the US context for addressing issues considered too ‘private’ or ‘offensive’ (Grindstaff 2002). Grindstaff argues that these kinds of programs are accused of breaking middle-class norm of ‘not exposing one’s feelings in public’, which is itself regarded as offensive. She also remarks that the producers of some programs, such as *Diana* or *Oprah*, want to avoid such criticism by appealing to middle-class tastes and values such as therapy and self-help. Although I observe that the marriage show format is also built on this kind of endeavour to construct difference between itself and its counterparts in terms of *quality* programming, I argue that the significance of this kind of gentrification of the show resides in the staff’s additional concern for maintaining the show as a proper pathway to marriage. As I have maintained throughout the chapter, this is because the participants are recruited to the show not only as interesting, charming participants who will trigger the audiences’ pleasure, but also as marriageable subjects. That is, the program staff, and above all the host, carry out the role of a conventional matchmaker, who has to maintain her/his reputation for being able to find suitable marriage partners. It is informative that Esra Erol invites people to participate in the show with the tagline: ‘*If your purpose is getting married, rather than mere entertainment*’. The staff’s emphasis on not offending the sensibilities of candidates and suitors, then, is related to the seriousness of its promise to help people get married in a *safe* way, within which conventional codes of matchmaking and marrying also operate. Thus it is very often emphasised that the show is produced for and through *higher* values.

However, I suggest that the idea of *not being offensive* on the basis of the candidates’ criteria already presupposes a hierarchy among candidates/suitors, which is

not easily resolved by providing the candidate the opportunity to list her/his criteria. The register of offensiveness points to the norm of *denklik* in order to limit to the possibility of endless lists of criteria. That is to say, staff do not simply follow candidates' criteria without question during the screening process. On the other side of the coin, the staff aims to shape candidates' expectations as well, in order to maintain *denklik* between them. The candidate is not allowed to expect someone with whom they do not have *denklik*. I very often observed staff actively engaging in this process with candidates before and during the live broadcast. For example, if the staff (or sometimes other candidates) think a candidate's expectations are over an *acceptable* limit given his/her living standard, they criticise him/her for demanding too much and being unrealistic. Cemile's case is an example of how both candidates and staff collaboratively draw a limit to the self by judging desire and expectation. Cemile was a female candidate around her forties, married once before. After meeting a suitor on stage and rejecting him by saying that '*he doesn't fit my criteria*', both the staff and the female candidates backstage judged her for being greedy: '*What do you expect after this age?*' said one of the staff members. Cemile seemed quite embarrassed: '*There must be a level of attraction, at least, but there was not!*' she replied. '*If you don't content yourself with less, you can't find better*'²⁷ replied one of the other candidates. Putting the digressive/improper usage of the proverb aside (how can one find a better marriage candidate in advance of accepting one she did not like at all?), this case demonstrates how limits to desire and attraction are drawn. While the other candidate tells Cemile that she should be content with less, I suggest that she does not mean that she should accept an inferior man; rather, she reminds Cemile that her criteria exceed acceptable limits given her circumstances, including age, class, financial situation, previous marriage, etc. Ultimately, it is no surprise that after she rejected the suitor, the staff decided to evict Cemile from the show.

²⁷ Turkish proverb: '*Aza kanaat etmeyen çoğu bulamaz.*'

Another crucial point is that whenever the conventions of the reality show meet those of marriage and matchmaking, it becomes possible to question existing familial norms. In the case of *denklik*, I would like to make note of a common criterion articulated by female candidates, which is indeed quite ambivalent. This criterion, uttered myriad times and always with the same words, is '*I'm looking for a man who can carry me*'. Indeed as often as it is used, I also note that audiences and candidates alike often make fun of the expression on the basis that the female candidates seem to be over-estimating themselves relative to their male suitors. It was also my impression that female candidates were generally more self-confident than male candidates, especially when those who reject suitors return backstage with a smile on their faces. Sometimes I had the feeling that especially young female candidates who were kept on the show for long periods (like 6 months or more) because they were popular and received a lot of suitors, *enjoyed* the opportunity to reject as many men as possible. Indeed this was not only my impression: one young and popular female candidate aged 20 who I call Hale here sometimes triggered the staff's anger by rejecting all of suitors. Once I was behind the male candidates' door, near the staff responsible for the male candidates. A suitor went to the stage to meet Hale. He was quite hopeful about the outcome. However, Hale rejected him without giving a concrete reason. I was also quite disappointed and turned to one of the staff members responsible for male candidates, asking him, '*why do you think she rejected him?*' '*You never know*', he replied, '*The only thing we know is that she is Hale, and she rejects!*' with controlled anger in his voice.

Nevertheless, I do not argue that the sentence '*I'm looking for a man who can carry me*' totally subverts the already established criteria of *denklik*. Indeed it can also operate within the regime of equivalence that the show aims for: male candidates are expected to prove they are strong and superior enough to *carry* a woman. Female candidates, on the other hand, many times express their expectation of men's superiority for a proper

marriage, and demand it from the suitors who come to the show to try and meet them. Similarly, they may express discomfort when they meet a male candidate who is not *superior* to them. I would like to give an example of a female candidate's account in order to clarify my point. Melike, a female candidate [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] She told me she regretted coming onto the show as a suitor for a man who she did not feel was quite *equivalent*:

I made a mistake. I mean I should not have come for someone and that's where I was mistaken. I should have come here and directly said 'This is me and I want this'. I made a mistake. As always, I behaved dominantly and wanted to give a chance to someone I saw on the screen. I didn't expect love, I didn't expect anything. Anyway, I said all of this on stage. But then I saw that he is not superior to me. And I want someone who is superior to me. I don't want to live with someone whom I don't respect because he is not superior. Because, thank God, I have everything, I need nothing. Say home, I have it, Say car, I have it. Say income, yes I have it. My income from my father's pension is more than enough for me.

Melike's account demonstrates how different normativities and feelings come into play in benchmarking one's self to a suitor. First of all, she differentiates between being a candidate vs. a suitor on the basis of the limits of proper womanhood. She thinks that she exceeded this limit by responding to the show's call and by coming as a suitor for a man. Indeed she expresses how she feels uneasy with the sense of the self that the show promotes. She thinks that she has a *dominant* character (which she probably feels is an unappreciated quality in a woman), yet this should be kept in control, rather than being encouraged and promoted by the show. She also feels uneasy about revealing she was attracted by a man so she immediately explains that it is not 'love' she is looking for. I discuss a similar avoidance of desirous feelings in Chapter 5 with other candidates. What I would like to emphasise here is that Melike herself draws the limits to the self actively, by juxtaposing the show's emphasis on the self against the conventions of courtship, which encourage **men's superiority as a means of equivalence yet guarantee of**

inequality. She both expresses her values and regrets giving someone a chance who was not good enough according to this value system.

Thus, candidate selection on the basis of *denklik* entails subtle negotiations of proper selfhood while also maintaining the gender regime that regulates conventions of marriage/matchmaking.

After selecting candidates/suitors through various screening processes, the next step is to prepare them for the live broadcast, which also entails subtle processes of framing, as I handle in the next section.

6.2 Preparation

It is one of my follow up visits. Esra Erol and I are chatting in her room. The program coordinator comes in. She tells the story of a candidate who just came into the studio: 'She is not so nice looking. A bizarre hairstyle and dress. I sent her to the hairdresser and told them to change her hair colour. They will also change her clothes. But she has an interesting story. A very moving one. Though she doesn't have an innocent look, I think she can move the audience. It is really a good one [story].' Pelin moved on telling the woman's story. What I remember from the story is a tragic story of failure: She is in her twenties and suffers from epilepsy. She escaped from the hospital and came to Istanbul with her friend. Then she met a man and lived with him for a while. The man left her after she got pregnant. She gave birth to a baby 2 months ago. She wanted to go back to her family, but her father said she can come back only if she leaves her child. She left the child with the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu). However, she has not gone back to her family because she wants to see the baby at least once a week.

The program coordinator's short description of the candidate's situation – which may sound quite ignorant of the woman's condition – summarises the pre-broadcast preparation process that takes place at various levels with new candidates. Pelin (the program coordinator) presents a quick list of the candidate's needs in order to leave a good impression on audiences as a marriage candidate, whilst her story is assessed and shaped according to audience expectations. 'A good story', from this vantage point, is

one that signals the potential for a ‘money shot’ or a dramatic ‘breakthrough’ moment that stirs the audience, as well as teases judgemental readings (Skeggs and Wood 2012). The candidate’s appearance, on the other hand, which seemed immodest to Pelin, should be presented in such a way as to produce the effect of innocence and enhance her authenticity and propriety as a marriageable candidate. I unpack the framing of the appearance below. The framing of the stories is the object of analysis in Chapter 7.

6.2.1 Appearance

As one can observe from Pelin’s account on the new candidate’s appearance above, looking one’s best is a crucial component of the preparation process. While Pelin finds the candidate’s story compelling she is concerned about her physical appearance, so sends her to the show-sponsored hair and wardrobe departments to tidy her up.

Dressing up for an appearance on television is a convention of the format in general, whether a news show or a serial. In the case of the reality show genre, dressing participants relates to the judgemental registers that heighten the sense of conflict and excitement among participants and attract the gaze of the audience to the screen. For example, audiences (and participants) judge the ordinariness of participants according to their appearance, commenting, in the case of the program *Survivor*, on physical change, endurance and strength. And make-over shows are solely dedicated to judgement and amelioration of appearance. Then, what are the norms incorporated into the framing of dress and appearance in the case of the marriage show?

The dressing and making over of female candidates attracted my attention from the beginning of my fieldwork. Even candidates who have been on the show for as a little as one week are distinguishable from new-comers from their glittering and colourful dresses, very high heels, styled hair and make-up. They would sometimes ask me whether their shoes matched their dresses, or whether their make-up was too much. Through these types of interactions the process of dressing for the show became increasingly significant over

the course of my field research, giving me a way to open conversations with female candidates. Interestingly enough, over the course of my visits to the studio, I also noticed a change in my own appearance. While still carrying a backpack for my equipment, I started to wear heeled shoes instead of more comfortable flat ones, and tried at least to put on a bit of eye make-up when going to the studio. Watching the candidates in the make-up room, I picked up tips, and eventually found that I had begun to assess my own appearance according to codes of beauty and propriety circulating in the studio. I also began to think of how moving through the studio had the effect of moving the bodies and body practices of female candidates towards self-care and towards looking in the mirror more often. Emphasis on the self takes on a different focus: a search for a complete, autonomous subjectivity which is enhanced and enabled by the cultural forms circulating within the context of what is called neo-liberalism. Rosalind Gill's study on the contemporary advertising industry draws our attention to a new kind of femininity which holds women to a particular form of subjectivity. i.e. 'a modernized version of heterosexual femininity as feisty, sassy, and sexually agentic' (2008: 438). She shows how 'a particular kind of beauty and sexiness has become a prerequisite for subjecthood itself', with an emphasis on 'pleasing oneself' or 'feeling good about oneself' (2008: 440). In the marriage show's studio, the emphasis on self-care which comes through the flow of images and forms that Gill outlines, allies and collides with the show's ultimate aim of producing proper marriageable subjects. In this respect, the show assimilates the image of *desiring subjectivity* as represented within the contemporary media industry to another level of proper femininity, a woman who takes care of herself with the aim of getting married, which draws a limit to the norms of beauty and self-care. I will clarify my point by providing women's accounts on their preparatory activities within the studio below.

After realising the change in my own appearance in the studio, I started to talk with female candidates about how they prepared physically for the show, whether they felt a

change in their appearances and whether they had gone shopping for the show. A considerable number of women said that they had done: ‘I’ve bought more dresses in the last week than I have in the last 10 years’, said Zerrin, a female candidate aged 41 who had been on the show only for one week. She sounded exhausted while telling me about the financial difficulty of sustaining an appearance on the show as a woman. Another female candidate, Ebru, on the other hand, was pleased with the change in her appearance. When I asked if she was going to shopping for the show, she answered,

Sometimes yes. I mean it requires some kind of care, given that millions are watching you on the screen. You take care of your clothing, you try to look beautiful and stylish. Indeed you feel yourself as a human, that’s what I realised here. I realised that I am a woman; for example, I never used to wear high heels. I was like a man, seriously, the show changed me.

Her account of womanhood intrigued me, so I followed up, asking what exactly had changed. Ebru answered,

I did not used to primp before, no make-up. Now my room is full of cosmetics [she laughs]. I mean I go out and buy whatever I see here.

I wanted to talk more about the introduction of high heels to her wardrobe, as my experience had been similar. ‘People usually have high heels on when they go on stage’, I said. She answered,

Oh there is a problem of height [we laugh]. You come here and see that most of them are wearing high heels, which is more beautiful. Then you look at yourself and want to be like them. You feel odd and begin to take care of yourself. This is not the case outside, you are free and untidy; however, you tidy yourself up here.

Indeed Ebru’s account very clearly demonstrates what kind of a selfhood is enabled and enhanced during the participation process. Even if not all women were happy to do so, they shifted towards a selfhood which makes them take more care with their appearances. I suggest that the more they do so, the more they are behaving within the

normative confines of female subjectivity, as Gill (2008) suggests. Interestingly enough, Ebru's realisation of this register of her selfhood is articulated as realising her womanhood, which is endowed with a desire to be good-looking. Her account of selfhood resonates with the selfhood that I traced in Sevil's account of coming on the show in Chapter 5. Just as in the case of loneliness as a narrative anchorage that enables a sense of selfhood, female candidates' primping is an embodied expression of the self.

Yet, as I will also demonstrate in this section, women's selfhood, which is felt in the most embodied form as they begin to take care of their physical appearance, is framed normatively again through the primping activities in the studio. Below, I draw the main pathway women take to this end to show how limits to selfhood are drawn through the norms and conventions of matchmaking.

Looking good and beautiful is learned by doing in the space of the studio, in collaboration with other women. They comment on each other, they learn beauty tips from the make-up person and hairdresser, they even ask for my thoughts on their appearance. All these take place within the homosocial space behind the scenes. As I noted earlier, the studio building is almost divided into two for the male and female candidates. After entering the studio, male candidates have only one backstage space reserved for them, and they go there to prepare and to wait for the show to begin. Meanwhile, female candidates go upstairs to the dressing room, hairdresser and make-up room, where they iron, try on and change clothes, choose shoes, comment on each other's styles and overall appearance. After changing their clothes, they go to the hairdresser, and then finally to make-up. Thus, as usual, primping and dressing up is a *women's issue* in the studio.



Figure 6-6: Detail from the make-up room: Cosmetic supplies and the daily candidate list



Figure 6-7: Women's changing room

Male candidates also take care of their appearance. Usually, they are assessed for their looks both on stage and backstage. The host or the female candidates very often comment on whether a male candidate/suitor looks younger/older than his age, or they congratulate those who dress smartly, or who come on stage with flowers for the female candidate. Yet, their preparation activities are not part of the daily routine in the studio. I should also point out that I was not very comfortable visiting the male candidates' room. As a female researcher, the room was closed to me especially before the broadcast, when they were changing their clothes and tidying themselves up. (I describe in detail my routes and the obstacles I faced during my research in Chapter 3). In contrast, I easily accessed the female spaces in the studio building and witnessed the primping activities. Gönül is the staff member who accompanies female candidates from location to location during their preparation activities. She describes the process as follows:

They, I mean the female candidates, come here at 1:00 pm. I come earlier, around 10:30. We prepare the flow²⁸ before they arrive. We check the flow and see how many guests will come that day, how many females, I mean. I welcome them at the main entrance and take them upstairs. The men are downstairs, and the women are upstairs, so as not to see each other. It is forbidden for them to go downstairs after that point, for the safety of the show. We make lists for hair and make-up according to the flow and they are escorted one by one to each station.

As Gönül states, female candidates queue outside the hair and make-up rooms according to a pre-determined list. I sometimes heard candidates murmuring about long waiting periods or because they did not like their hairstyle. I also witnessed many times women advising the hairdresser to pay them extra care because they were expecting a suitor on the day, or because they had come as a suitor for a candidate.

²⁸ *The flow* Sedef addresses is a document prepared together by the program coordinator, the producer, and the guest coordinators together; it lists what will happen during the live broadcast. For a detailed description, see chapter 7.

In Chapter 4, I described how the register of trust is accompanied by the register of safety in female candidates' accounts on the show, with an emphasis on the homosocial organisation of the space. Interestingly enough, Gönül also refers to safety as a norm to be maintained during the primping period, albeit with a different emphasis, i.e. the *safety* of the show. They are careful to maintain the promise that male and female candidates will not see each other backstage. To that end, the dressing activities become *gendering* activities, not only because they produce female bodies according to certain norms (of beauty, innocence, etc.) but also they regulate male and female candidates' movements in the space of the studio, by moving them onto separate pathways for different routines of preparation.

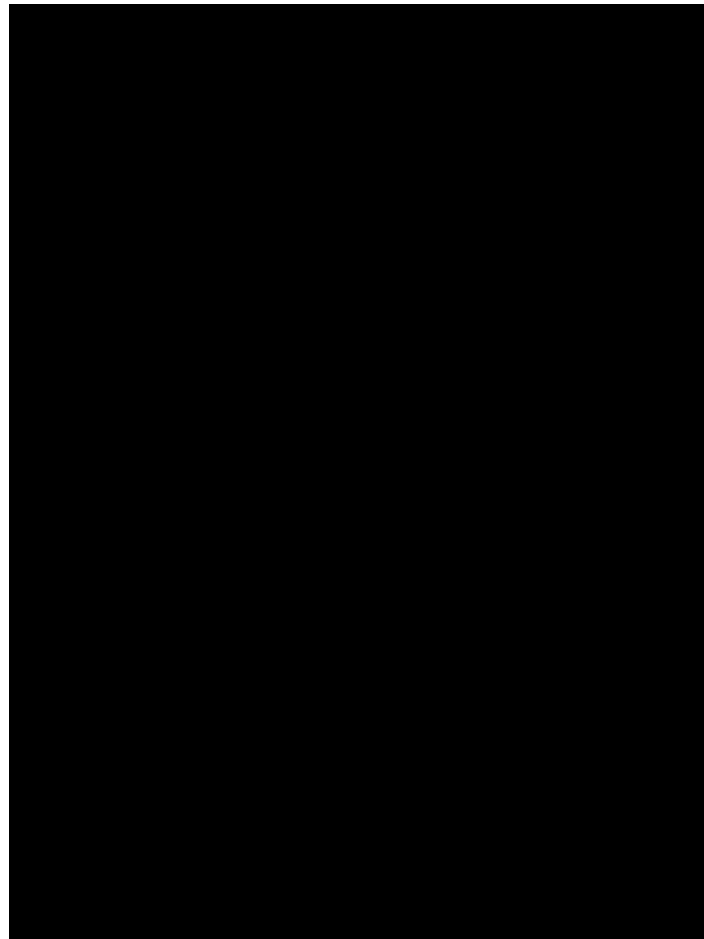


Figure 6-8: *A female candidate posing for me in the changing room before going downstairs for the live broadcast.*

Dressing up, which entails a specific form of movement within the space of the studio, also produces female bodies according to certain norms. It is crucial to remember here what Pelin said about the new candidate: '*She doesn't look so innocent.*' As Pelin provides clues, the staff not only assess candidates' appearance in terms of beauty and self-care, but also according to norms related to marriage and matchmaking. They seek, and if they cannot find, they shape the candidate's appearance in order to leave a good, beautiful and *innocent* impression on audiences, from which potential suitors are attracted. In this way, they tend to register the candidate as 'woman for wedlock' as opposed to 'woman for delight' which is a (highly sexist) proverb that is widely used in Turkey. Esra Erol adapts this proverb to the format in her call for participation: *Come to the show if you want to get married, not just have fun*', which can be also read as '*Be woman of wedlock, rather than woman of delight*'. Thus, dressing up is another framing activity through which norms of matchmaking/marriage are subtly incorporated into the production process of the marriage show.

As I try to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the norms that enable the staff to maintain the limits of propriety are usually in conflict/tension with each other, which makes the work of framing fiercer. This is the case for the dressing of the candidates/suitors as well. I will bring forward an example from the show in order to clarify my point. One woman in a mini-skirt came to the show as a suitor. The male candidate, after the folding door opened, rudely criticised her clothing, saying '*I think you did not listen to my criteria before coming here. I am expecting women who dresses modestly*'. As I noted earlier, *criteria* is the key word regarding candidate expectations from suitors. The participation process entails the subtle work of assessing candidates' criteria, and merging them with *denklik* as a norm of conventional matchmaking processes (see section 6.2.2). However, doing so also opens up a space for candidates to make assertions of criteria based on appearance; this invariably offends the female suitor, which

in turn violates another norm of the show: not being offensive. So, not surprisingly, in this scenario Esra Erol became tense, quickly found a shawl from the audience, covered the woman's legs with it and asked the male candidate: *'Is it ok for you now? Is this what you want? Does it make any difference?'* She went on to make a speech about not being offensive, and giving suitors a chance as they make their way to the studio to meet the candidates.

I find several aspects of this incident significant. First of all, interestingly, by covering the female suitor's legs with a shawl, Esra Erol *parodies* the process of getting prepared for the show, an integral part of the production she hosts. These activities by candidates and suitors involve framing, limiting and covering that which is physically or symbolically undesirable, i.e. one's appearance, life story, living conditions, suitability and *denklik* with the suitor, etc., all of which are reminiscent of this suitor having her legs (an excess) covered with a shawl.

On the other hand, all the selection and preparation processes enable subjects to express their feelings and expectations within the conventions of matchmaking. The male candidate thereby found a space, however rudely, to criticise the female suitor for not fitting his criteria.

Esra Erol's performance is interesting from this vantage point because it calls both aspects of the format into question, pointing to both parties in the matchmaking process as individuals stripped of the criteria, norms, conventions which are thoroughly maintained during the production process, and calling them to another register of propriety, kindness and gentlemanliness, as if it were a conventional first meeting between two strangers, and as if they were not on two sides of a folding screen endowed with those very criteria, norms and conventions.

6.3 Going on Stage

As I stated at the outset, from the production perspective, the marriage show is the outcome of an enormous effort by the staff to select suitable candidates and suitors, and then to move them towards the stage on time. As described above, all of the selection and preparation activities lead to the ultimate framing of appearance, narratives and encounters, which take place on stage. Framing involves normative negotiations over who can appear on screen/who can get married on television. From this vantage point, framing is an activity designed to ‘routinize the unexpected’ (Tuchman 1973/2012) through more subtle normative negotiations. Indeed, it is very delicate work which can never be completed because every candidate and suitor brings unpredictability to the stage in her/his own way.

Before moving on to describing what happens on stage in the next chapter, I would like to describe the stage of the marriage show itself, and to depict the candidates’/suitors’ movements onto the stage, which take place during the live broadcast, according to the program’s *flow*. Here, it is crucial to elaborate on the concept of *flow*. Noting that *flow* is an established term within media studies (Williams 1974), I use it with a similar emphasis, though to point to a different aspect of television production. In his seminal work on television, Raymond Williams defines *flow* as a prevalent characteristic of television broadcasting both as a technology of production and as a cultural form:

What is being offered is not, in older terms, a program of discrete units with particular insertions, but a planned flow, in which the true series is not the published sequence of program items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences together compose the real flow, the real ‘broadcasting’ (1974/2003: 91).

The flow of television broadcasting, according to Williams’ conceptualisation, is composed of the simultaneous flow of different sequences of programs which are interrupted in a controlled way by commercials and coming attractions. The broadcasting

flow is thoroughly planned to keep audiences' attention on TV, albeit at changing levels of intensity throughout the day.

I do not use flow in the same way; instead, I retain an emphasis on a particular TV show. Indeed I borrow the term from the field, from the production process, wherein it refers to a document that shows who will appear when during live broadcast. It is compiled in the production department according to information provided by the guest coordinators, the editing department and the call centre. The production assistant writes the flow down and updates it whenever a change occurs. Miray, the production assistant, describes the first draft of the flow as the *fake flow*, since it is changed a number of times during the live broadcast. The program coordinator presents the fake flow to the host before the show. This is the only information the host has about the flow before the program goes on the air. On several occasions I witnessed staff backstage urgently approaching each other in search of the newest version of the flow, then hastily rearranging the candidate queue outside accordingly. One can never expect a predictable, structured flow on the marriage show. Nevertheless, the staff from different departments keep in touch and constantly update the flow, trying to minimise the unexpected. Thus, the program flow, as with Williams' description of broadcast flow, is interrupted in a controlled way to manage the live broadcast.

The live broadcast is full of uncertainties on the candidates' parts as well. As I maintain throughout the chapter, the production process engages norms and feelings that either encourage or inhibit candidates' movements into the flow of the show. It was a couple of weeks before I decided to wrap up the fieldwork that I conducted my first interview with Esra Erol. I was never sure whether she was aware of the course of my research, and when I said to her that I had been in the studio for more than 8 months, she replied *'I know. I feel that if we give you a job, you'll do it'*. I laughed: *'Sometimes I also feel that I am part of the staff, Esra hanım. For example the candidates ask my opinion*

as they're deciding whether to go on stage' I replied. Esra Erol's answer demonstrates her awareness of the difficulties some candidates have going on stage:

I know, it is difficult. Because, I mean, they somehow suppress their excitement and venture to come to the studio, get through the door, make it backstage. However, there is this door which opens out to the live broadcast and yes, it is the moment they meet me. It is really difficult.

As the one who waits on the other side of the door, Esra Erol also feels the tension experienced by candidates as that door opens. In this section, I describe the movements of the candidates and suitors during the live broadcast, which have to be made to suit the pace of the show, in accordance with the flow that is prepared and abruptly updated during the live broadcast, and in the presence/under the gaze of an actively participating public that assesses and judges their appearance, their criteria, their *denklik* with other candidates/suitors, and their self-narratives and expectations of marriage. This kind of publicity can be thought of as what Berlant calls the intimate public:

... a world of strangers who would be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent, with all that entails: varieties of suffering and fantasies of transcendence; longing for reciprocity with other humans and the world; irrational and rational attachments to the way things are; special styles of ferocity and refusal; and a creative will to survive that attends to everyday situations while imagining conditions of flourishing within and beyond them. (2008: 5).

In this section, I aim to describe the world of publicity candidates step into upon being selected and prepared for the show. The publicity includes people who are (expected to be) emotionally literate to each other's narratives and appearances, first and foremost because they are part of the same conventions (conventions of the genre and conventions of marriage). Yet, as I have maintained throughout the chapter, these conventions are always in negotiation for each and every participant, and each self-

narrative includes its own tensions and failures that are open to judgement, and that correspond to different *intensities* of feeling within the show's intimate public (see Chapter 7). Thus, the ultimate passage onto the stage is not an easy moment, as I will demonstrate below.

After a long decision-making process and then a series of preparatory activities, the female candidates go downstairs 15-20 minutes before the live show begins. The male candidates are already in their backstage room, and their door is closed while female candidates walk the narrow corridor behind the stage, pass by the male candidates' door and go to their own backstage room behind a stage door. Some of the candidates go to the candidate seats located on the stage, while others wait their turn to go on stage according to the flow of the three-hour program flow.

The stage is where the show actually takes place, in the sights of five cameras, by my count. Physically, it is a circular space where the host, the participant audiences, the orchestra and the candidates are located. The orderliness of the stage is important and is checked carefully before the show. The audience seats must be full, the spaces in view of the cameras must be cleared of people, and the candidate seats must be occupied by the most suitable candidates. The design and control of the stage, and the regulation of people's location and flow on and around the stage are the main tasks performed by a substantial number of staff during the live broadcast. The cameras are located around the stage to select and shoot what is going on; their footage is transmitted to the control room, where the **text** will ultimately be framed and served to the home audience by the director. As such, the contours of the stage itself constitute a frame, which is sketched through different platform levels, décor, the camera movements, and finally the staff who control the human flow within the studio. A considerable amount of production activity is involved in the control of people's entrance onto and exit from the stage on time. The studio director checks the order of the stage, communicates with the director who is in

the control room, while also maintaining eye contact with the host during the live show. She writes what is coming next on a piece of white paper and the host announces the opening of the candidate doors and the name of the next person to appear on stage accordingly.

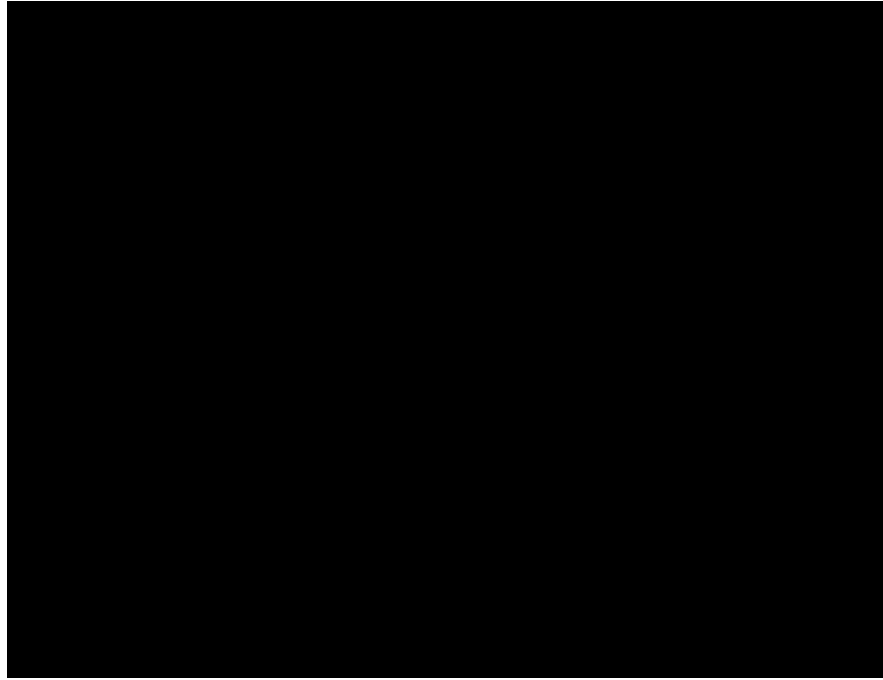
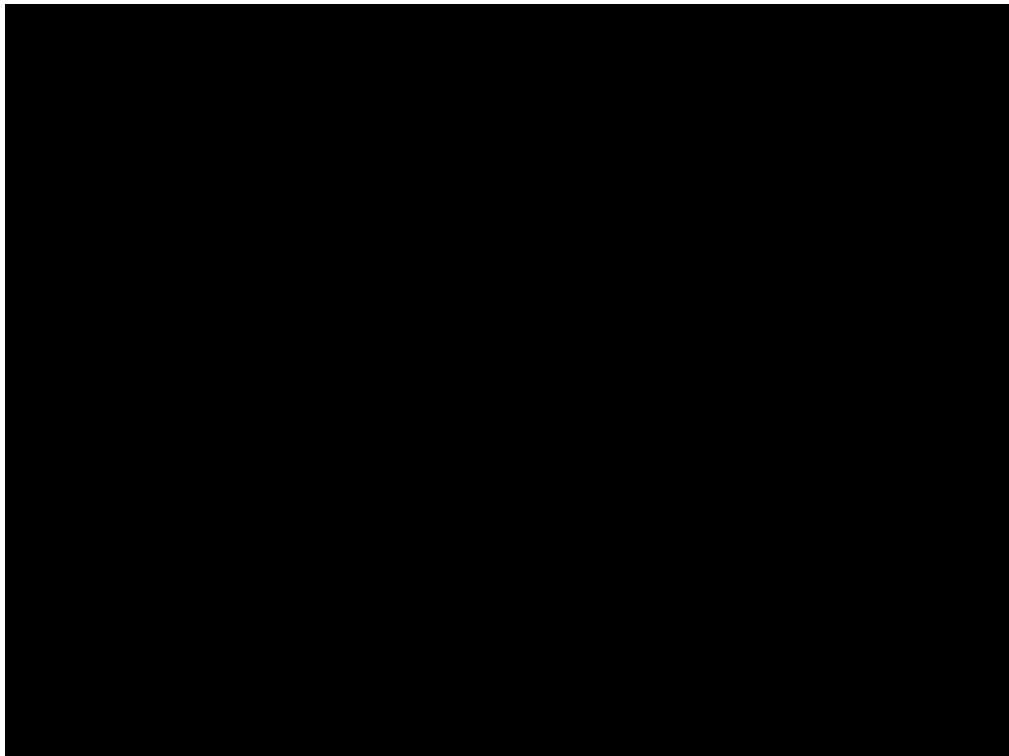
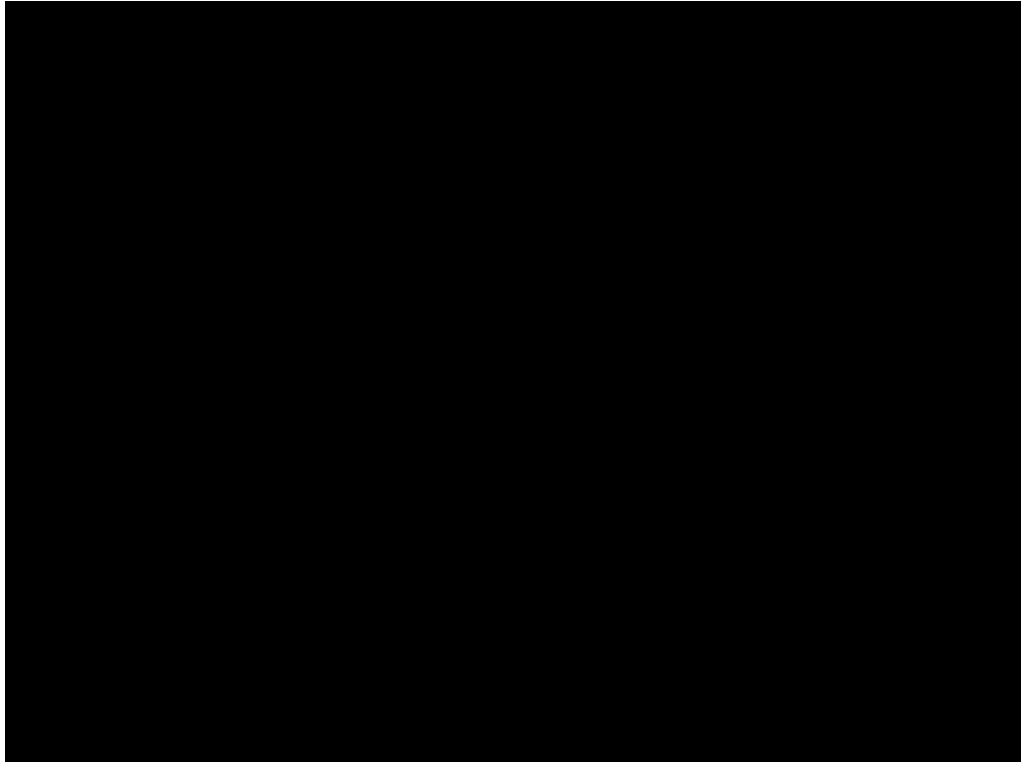


Figure 6-9: Mina writes what is up next on a piece of paper and Esra Erol makes announcements accordingly.

6.3.1 Candidate Doors and the Folding Screen

The candidates use two doors, which are built into the motif of the set décor. The male and female candidates enter the stage from separate doors and take their seats on stage with a folding screen between them. After meeting on stage they may either leave together to go on a date, or separately in search of another partner; they may also leave the show permanently. As they leave the stage, the doors are closed until the next two guests are announced. Indeed, the format is largely dependent on the timing of these doors: Who will appear from the women's/men's door when, and when and how will the folding screen be opened so they can meet each other? The excitement returns anew each time the doors open and new guests appear.



***Figure 6-10:** A female candidate comes on stage from the door. She moves a few steps over, and Esra Erol stops her, in order to prevent her from seeing the suitor before the folding screen opens.*

I spent considerable time in the female candidates' room. Besides interviewing candidates and other staff members, most of the time I sat there and chatted with Gönül, the staff member responsible for the female guests' routine. During our conversations, she often remarked about how important it was to open the door on time; not before or after the announcement but exactly at the moment the candidate is expected to appear on stage. If it is not opened on time, she said, *'We may die!'* Another staff member, Banu, gave a striking example: *'Once a woman objected to walk when the door opened and we – I, Gönül and Ahu – [physically] pushed her onto the stage'*. Gönül added, *'One of the most frightening things, on the other hand, is if one of the candidates suddenly opens the door. That's why I block it with my foot while waiting for the announcement'*.

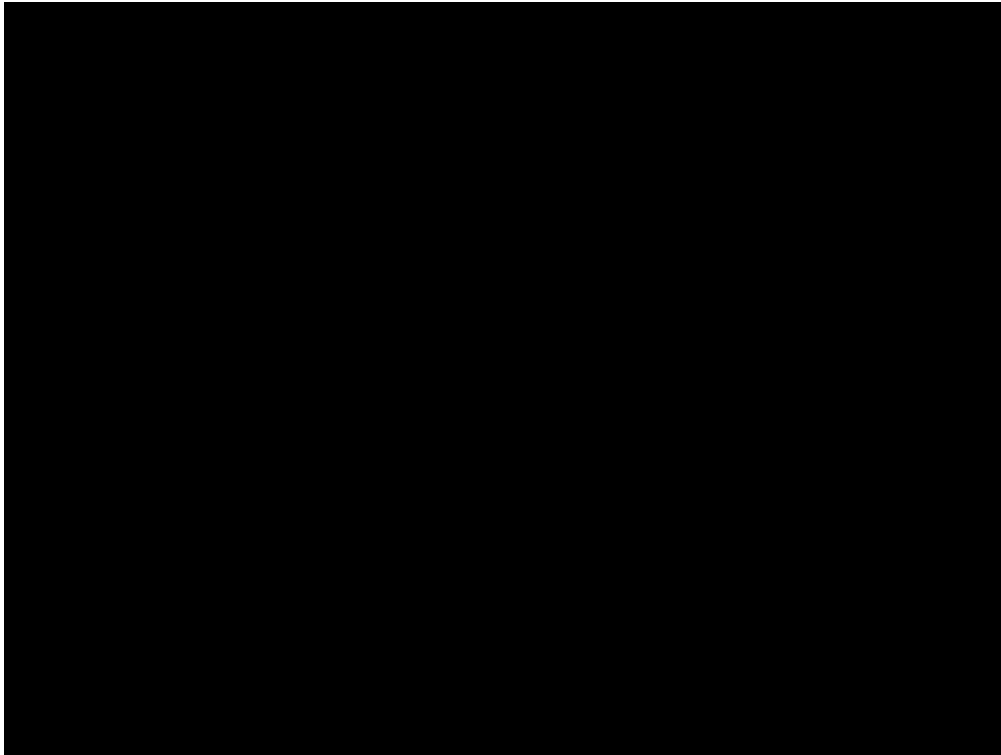


Figure 6-11: *A female candidate waits to step on stage. Gönül blocks the door with her right foot.*

I witnessed another instance that supports the staff's stated concern over moving candidates on stage according to the program flow. One female candidate, Gizem, who

came to declare her decision about a male candidate, was not sure about going on stage, saying that she was not feeling quite ready. Pelin, the program coordinator, warned her with a tense and determined voice: *'Don't let us down. We called you here today to explain what happened. You came today just for this, you know. Just say it and get rid of him'*. This time, she was pushing the candidate towards the stage with her persuasive speech.

In another case, a female candidate grew anxious backstage as the broadcast progressed, worrying that her segment would be bumped due to time constraints: *'My family puts me through the wringer when they don't see me on screen. Where have you been all the day, they ask'*. Since she had gone outside on the premise of participating in the marriage show, if she did not appear on screen, her family would be suspicious of her whereabouts.

The staff is responsible for moving candidates towards the stage on time, while a variety of norms, desires, excitements also either encourage them to push the pace of candidate introduction forward or pull it back. The candidates in the first two examples were hanging back, prompting staff to push them to go on stage. In the third example, the candidate was eager to appear on stage to reassure her family, who were using the broadcast to monitor her movement. As these examples demonstrate, the candidates have an ambivalent relationship with the show's publicity; they may be both attracted and repelled by certain aspects of the show's staging.

Besides the candidate doors, there is another door that is a crucial part of the format, this time which *crosscuts* the stage/the intimate public of the show. After coming on stage, the candidate and the suitor take their seats on either side of a *folding screen*. As I pointed out earlier, they see each other first time when the folding screen is opened. The candidate and the suitor have a short conversation before seeing each other, and ask the opinions of those sitting in the candidate seats, who can see both of them. Then, the host announces

‘Open the screen!’ The orchestra plays an upbeat song, the candidate and the suitor stand up, and finally they see each other. The folding screen is an extension of the frame that separates the male and female spaces of the studio. The timely opening of the door is, like with all other doors, part of the format. It is also the most unpredictable moment: what will happen when they see each other? It is the peak point of joy and excitement.

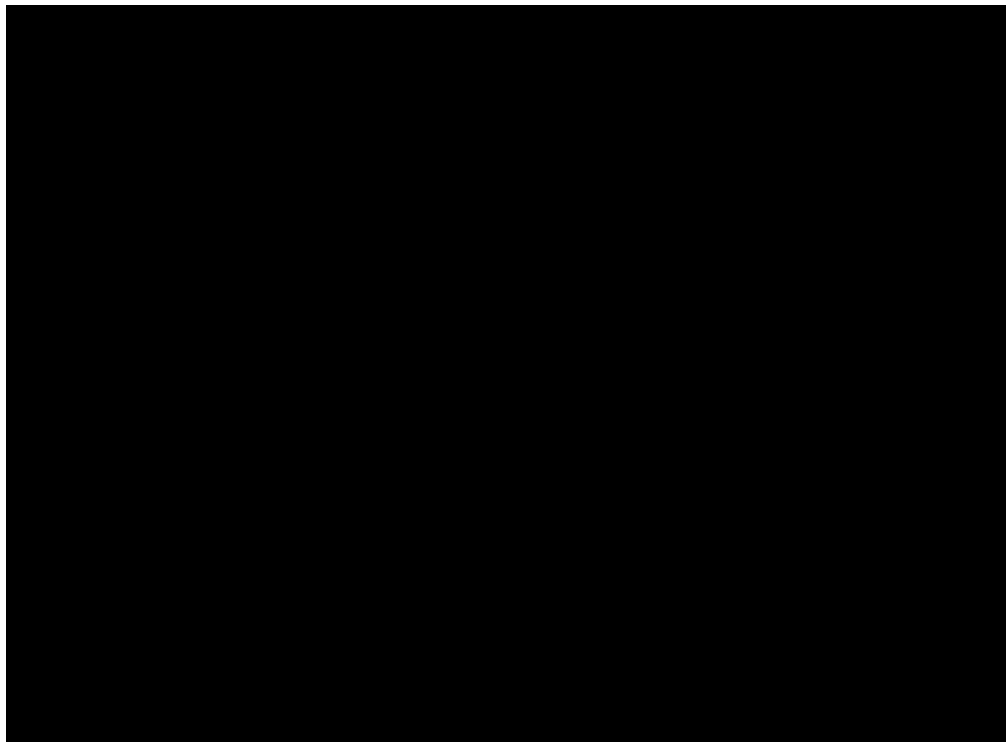


Figure 6-12: *The candidate and the suitor talk while waiting for the folding screen to be opened.*

Being essential aspects of the format, the doors and the folding screen, which let the candidates and suitors in, are an important level of the matchmaking process if we remember that the show is (also) a pathway to marriage. It is the moment just before the candidate explains her/his story on stage with the aim of getting married, or just before a candidate meets the suitor that came for her/him and vice versa. Thus, the candidate doors are the frontiers of what all the preparation and framing processes have been dedicated to: staging proper marriage candidates, suitors, and their performances as subjects on the way to marriage. I elaborate on what happens on stage after all the work of framing, and the tensions arising thereof, in Chapter 7.

6.3.2 *Candidate Gallery*

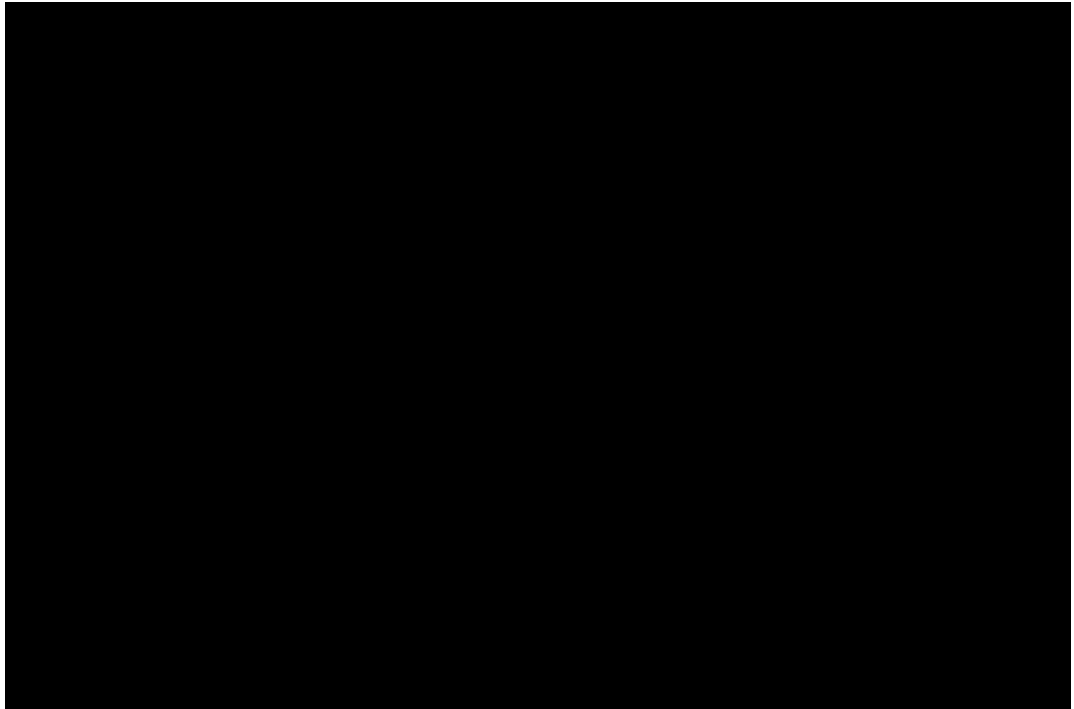


Figure 6-13: *The candidate gallery.*

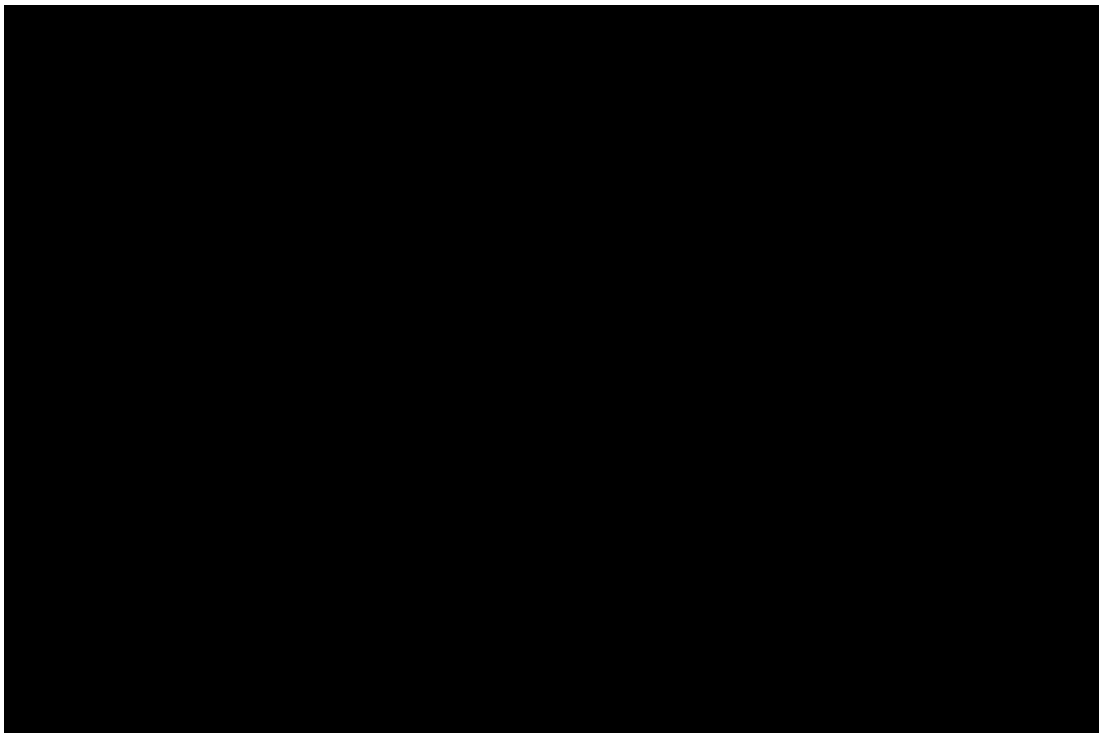


Figure 6-14: *The candidates in the seats on stage are framed on the television screen with short biographical data (here '27/24 years old, never married, lives in Istanbul'), the call centre's phone numbers, and an invitation to apply via Esra Erol's Facebook page.*

As I depicted above, candidates come on stage from backstage doors to meet a suitor. In addition, a limited number of candidates also remain on stage during the live broadcast. These candidates are occasionally shown on camera alongside snippets of biographical data like age, location, marital history, etc. Just 10 minutes before the show, the studio director selects those who will sit in the candidate gallery. This seating arrangement is thus another act of framing, singling out some candidates for greater visibility while others remain backstage.

The selection of candidates to sit on stage takes place as follows: Candidates line up in front of Mina, the studio director. She calls the names of those she has selected, after which those who have not been selected go to their designated backstage room to wait their turn according to that day's program flow. Mina states that she usually prefers talkative people to stay on stage so they might contribute comments that keep the broadcast lively. Though she notes that '*it is totally up to me to choose them*', I argue that Mina's choice is related to the convention of televisual broadcast that anything on the screen must be there for a reason: those who do not play their role as reality show participants will not occupy a position on stage. Kavka and West point out that reality shows are usually edited in order not to allow 'dead time' when '*nothing happens*' (2004: 143). In the case of a live show, though, dead time cannot be cut by editors, so the candidates on stage serve the function of enlivening the broadcast. They are thus obliged to perform; as a result, those whose comments are valued by other candidates, who generate excitement and joy, who entertain audiences with their repartee with the host become almost fixed inhabitants of the candidate gallery. At the time of my research, there were candidates who had been in their seats on stage for more than a season – even two years or more. They had become renowned public candidates who were often called to by name by audience members. '*What is Ahmet doing there?*', '*Why does Emir not*

accept any of those beautiful suitors?’ were the types of questions I often heard from people who learned I was doing fieldwork on Esra Erol’s show.

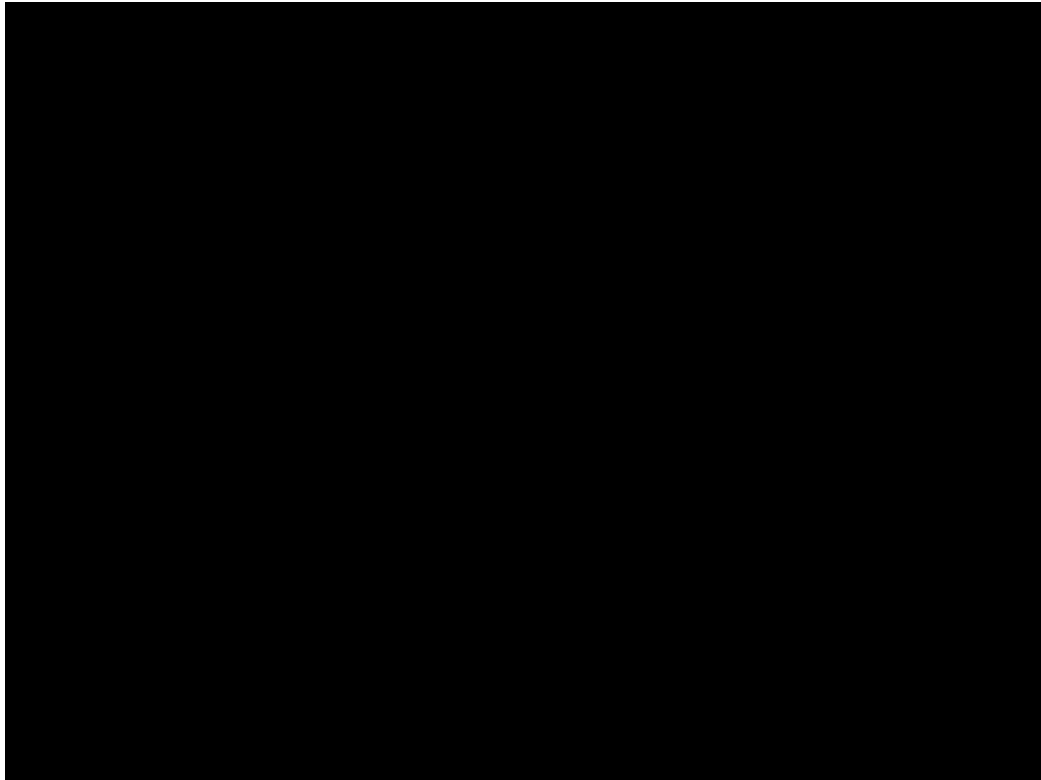


Figure 6-15: *The studio director arranges the candidate gallery.*

In addition to this, the gallery has a special function, as candidates’ comments are an important part of the process of matchmaking. For example, whenever the folding screen opens and a candidate and suitor meet on stage, the candidate turns to those in the seating area and asks their opinions about the suitor. These candidates in the gallery may take on any of several registers as they comment on the suitor: they may speak like an expert, like a close friend, like a close kin/family member. They sometimes say ‘*he seems like a good guy, you can have a tea outside*’, or ‘*I cannot say anything about her personality, but I think this is not what you’re expecting*’. A myriad of comments and discussions take place during these decision-making periods, and Esra Erol herself points

out that this sets the show apart from other contemporary matchmaking venues like dating websites (as I quoted at the beginning of the chapter):

People already meet on the Internet, or social media. Nobody knows about these meetings, may be except for their very close friends. However, millions witness their meeting here.

By making the first meeting open to public judgement, the marriage show conforms to conventional matchmaking processes, within which advice about the *denklik* of a candidate and suitor is sought, assessed and rendered.

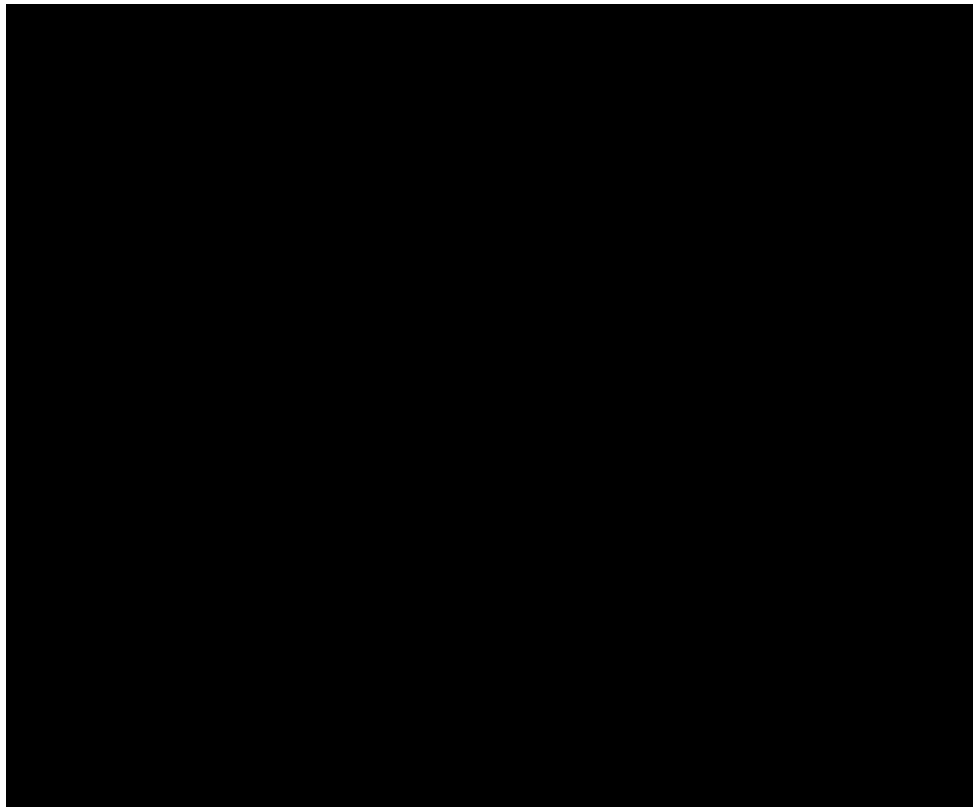


Figure 6-16: *The female candidate turns to other candidates to ask their opinions about the suitor.*

The candidates' appearance on stage is crucial to moving audiences for their own purposes as well. They expect to find suitors among those who watch them on television. Many times, I noticed candidates expressing interest in taking the seats in the gallery because they think that the more they appear on screen, the more people will see them and approach them for dating and marriage. Thus, there are various levels of potential

subject capacity to be invested in the show: the capacity of candidates to attract audiences to the show, and the capacity of audiences to become candidates/suitors.

6.3.3 *Studio Audiences*

The studio audiences form another site of investment in the show's publicity. This investment happens at two levels: First, finding audience members, bringing them to the studio, and arranging the seating implicates a process of framing (selection and preparation). Second, bringing the audience in from the outside is itself a process of framing, and its members constitute a frame that separates the program from the outside as well. That is to say, they stand *by* the stage as part of the show, representing outsiders looking in on the show. Thus, they both *are* a frame and are subject to a certain framing process. They have to find a way to come to the show, to get through the security controls, and act according to the studio director's commands. The routinisation of these framing processes are an important part of the show's success and legitimacy.

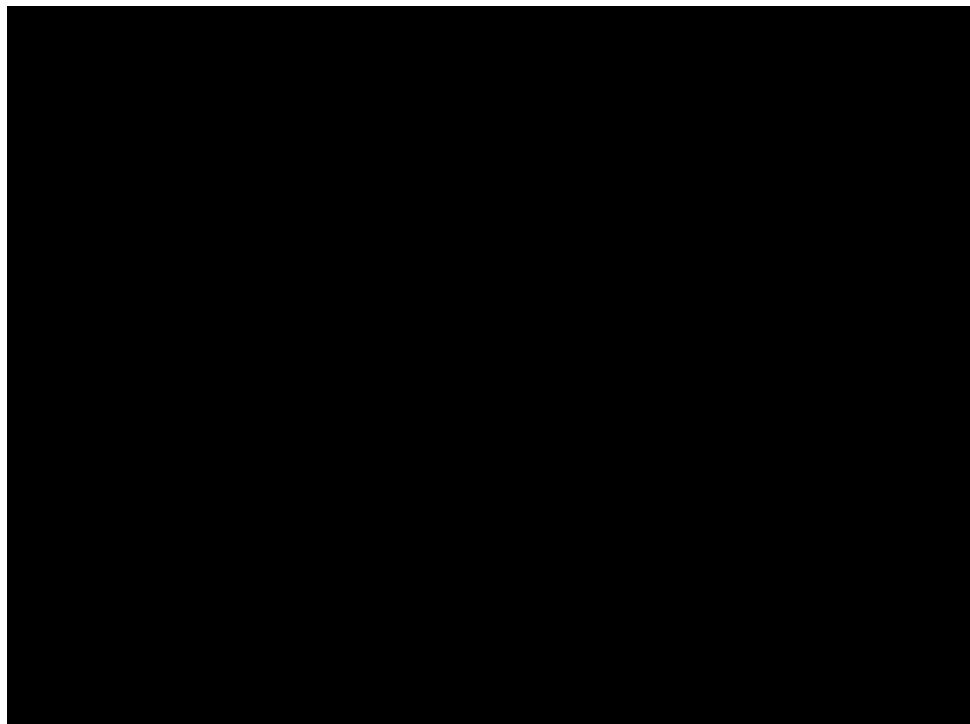


Figure 6-17: *The studio audiences take their seats before the live broadcast.*

The task of finding and bringing in participant audiences is delegated to an audience agency. I interviewed two staff members from the agency who said they had been in their jobs for around 10 years. Their job is basically to find audiences for participatory formats using their personal networks and friends. One of them, Meral, told me that she only brings audience members from her own neighbourhood, and most of them are her friends, neighbours or friends of friends. She works with Nevin, the audience coordinator, who is responsible for filling all the audience seats every day. Nevin, on the other hand, was not so eager to be interviewed by me. We had a very short, unrecorded conversation. '*It is difficult to find audiences nowadays*', she complained. When I asked why the audiences came to the show, her reply was very short: '*Because people get married here, there is no other reason*'. From this I gather that the appeal of participating in the show as audience members is loosely drawn on the basis of ordinariness, fandom and availability (available time and access to the network of people who come to the show). Thus, becoming a part of the human flow of the show for audience members is proximity dependent, where existing interstitial linkages may be exploited to bring them nearer to the show.

The audience, demarcating one of the frames of the studio, is seated just opposite the stage, near the jimmy-jib camera, between the orchestra and the candidate seats. Audience members take their seats before the broadcast begins and serve as a focal point throughout the live broadcast for the host, who very often orients her body language towards them and draws them into the flow of the show in various ways.

What is crucial about the studio audiences with respect to the live broadcast is that they constitute a slice of the human flow – a slice between viewing audiences and participants – that symbolises the publicity component of the show. That is, they bring the notion of publicity into the studio, which might otherwise feel *excessively* intimate for the candidates, especially those in the candidate seats who know each other, who share

the same daily routine, hotel, changing rooms, etc. So, the studio audiences, by bringing the public gaze in, set limits on the intimacy of the studio experience. By representing the public and being addressed by the host throughout the broadcast, they draw a distinction between the candidates and the *auditing* public, which helps the show to be registered as an entertainment format.

6.4 Conclusion to Chapter 6

So far, I have handled the stages of selection (of candidates), and preparation (of candidates' appearance) as framing practices. Borrowing the term *frame* from Butler (2009), I have traced how the participation of candidates in the show entails subtle normative negotiations over who can appear on screen, who can marry whom, on what terms, and under which conditions. I have also described the stage and the candidates' final movements towards the public venue of the show, which entails ambiguities and tensions which are sought to be resolved within the pace and intensity of the live broadcast.

At all levels of framing, the show is sought to be registered as an attractive TV show and as a safe and proper pathway to marriage. Accordingly, the two parties involved in these negotiations and tensions, the staff and the candidates, make particular investments in the frames of the show. As candidates are assessed by staff members according to their appropriateness, candidates also bring norms and conventions of matchmaking into the production process of the show, such as *equivalence* and *marriage age*, which are themselves controversial. Thus, a particularly charming and distinctive television format is produced with every broadcast, whilst the norms and conventions of matchmaking are also being negotiated.

I also pointed out the centrality of the code of trust, which operates in various ways for various subjects of the show: the candidates, the staff and the host. At all levels, trust

bridges different norms, i.e. the conventions of the format and the conventions of matchmaking.

At a larger scale, I have argued that what is framed is self-narrating subjectivity, which is a special form of subjectivity that is enhanced and encouraged within the generic conventions of the reality show, yet which is confined in specific ways according to the family as a regime of secrecy. There is a safe limit to self-expression on the marriage show, which constitutes the confines within which a candidate may be deemed appropriate/marriageable. As I have shown throughout the chapter, these limits/confines work in particular for female subjectivity, which has always been under scrutiny in the making of proper female subjects in Turkey. Thus, the work of framing in the marriage show entails the delicate work of dealing with the sense of self that it puts into play within broader processes by which proper subjects are cultivated for marriage, family and ultimately the nation.

Finally, because the self-narratives and appearance of candidates are part of larger subject-making processes, publicity becomes an important venue for assessing and judging the level of appropriateness within those narratives. I have described how the publicity maintained during the live show serves as a backdrop for unfolding self-narratives on stage.

Then, what kind of self-narratives unfold during the live show, after female candidates pass through the framing process, make their way to the program flow, and finally, pass through the candidate doors? I elaborate on the stories of female candidates in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7: NARRATING THE SELF

Every normative instance is shadowed by its own failure.

(Butler, Frames of War)

Throughout my analysis of the marriage show as a reality show format and as a pathway to marriage, I have tried to portray the intense present of televisual production, which is endowed with the normative negotiations and affective movements of subjects (candidates, audiences and staff) at various levels, within the pace and intensity of a three-hour live broadcast five days a week. As I described in Chapter 6, the participation process of the candidates and the suitors entails extensive normative negotiations over their propriety, which nevertheless have to take place within this intense present: The candidates are selected and prepared for the show on the basis of norms pertaining the conventions of matchmaking on the one hand, and the necessities of producing a charming television show on the other. All of these are done on a daily basis with the participation of hundreds of people (staff, candidates/suitors, studio audiences), and within the temporality of a live broadcast. As the host, Esra Erol, puts it: *‘Everything has to be so speedy here. [They say] yes or no and the time is over’*.

The question I pursue in this chapter is how the self-narratives which are selected and framed before the show are performed on stage. While the staff assert that they choose the candidates and frame the self-narratives with care, the stage is an open venue and many times participants’ life stories do exceed the acceptable confines of who is marriageable/representable. I would like to remind the reader of my argument that the reality show genre, has made room for the formerly excluded *masses* and their lives within the frame (Chapter 2). I observe that candidates whose narratives subvert the staff’s and the candidates’ discourses of propriety tend to gain quite a bit of notoriety, even among people who do not watch the show. For example, one can find hundreds of video clips from the show on YouTube with striking titles like *‘How did this female candidate’s*

criteria shock audiences?’, ‘*Esra Erol threw this candidate out of the studio!*’, ‘*Pregnant woman attends the show as a marriage candidate!*’, ‘*Turkey hasn’t seen a groom-to-be like this before!*’ and so on. Some of these videos have been watched tens of thousand of times, and their notoriety may even spread to human interest news reports to become the subject of water cooler chatter and other public discussion. Thus, as I argued in Chapter 2, the marriage show definitely complicates the gap between what is represented and everyday realities. However paradoxically, as these instances and stories from everyday realities transgress the television frame, they are simultaneously judged as trashy, fictitious and unrealistic by the public. I have maintained throughout the dissertation that the marriage show producers are concerned with avoiding negative criticism, and accordingly, they seek to re-draw the boundaries of propriety throughout the production process. However, they are also concerned with producing an interesting, charming, popular TV show which attracts audiences to the television screen and keeps the show on the air. Thus, the marriage show format is a product of the tension between *the frames* and *the leakages* that transgress the frames. With the term leakage, I refer to narratives and subjects that complicate the frames of the *proper*, putting something forward to the public gaze that had never previously been represented within the frame.

My argument in this chapter is that *propriety* is produced dynamically through this very tension between frames and leakages. That is, propriety is not inherent to the subjects and their lives, but is produced as participants narrate their lives on stage, thus opening up a space of judgement within the intimate public of the show. As I put it in Chapter 6, the stage is where candidates step into the glare of publicity after the delicate work of framing has taken place at different levels. It is also where a specific form of intimacy operates: the host’s performance and the presence of studio audiences affectively produces intimacy (emotional closeness) within the space of the studio, and the live aspect of the show produces the effect of immediacy (temporal closeness) (Kavka & West 2004;

see Chapters 6 and 8). I refer to the intimacy of the live broadcast in the sense Berlant uses the term: ‘an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way’ (1998: 281). Thus, the live broadcast of the marriage show produces an intimate public within which various subjects feel and move close to each other, either by participating in the show as candidates and suitors and *narrating* their stories in the studio, or joyfully (sometimes addictively) watching the show in their homes/the studio, and participating in judgemental discussions about these narratives with friends and family. In this way, the frames of the marriage show involve both the acceptable confines of who/what comes on screen, and the work of moving/charming people into becoming part of that human flow, to get closer, to narrate their stories and to judge each others’ stories normatively. It is in these moments of narration and judgement that propriety is constructed and re-constructed.

To decipher how the show constructs propriety out of a myriad of stories which fall onto different scales of judgement, I first depict how the subjects and their stories are accepted onto the show. Later on, I elaborate on the performances of two female candidates on stage.

7.6 Framing the Story

While screening applicants for the show, the staff first look for a story to be told. They interview the potential candidates several times (on the phone and in the studio) from which they construct a short biography and finally locate them within the flow of the show. The stories shape the conversations between the candidate, the host and the potential suitors on stage. Framing the stories and differentiating them from each other are two production activities that entail normative negotiations between the candidate and the staff, like all other moments of framing. In this section, I aim to show what I mean by differential selection of the candidates and their stories.

It is crucial to note that because I did not witness any of the confidential interviews between candidates and staff in the studio before the broadcast, my analysis in this section is based on my observations of what happens before and after the interview, in addition to the staff's and candidates' accounts of the interview process. In this section, I reflect on the staff's account, which selectively points to the filters they use to frame the stories. Indeed those filters already show that the narratives are judged according to certain registers which conform to (however fluid and flexible) criteria of propriety. Framing life stories involves a level of judgement and categorisation which takes place through subtle negotiations of what/who can appear on screen to attract audiences, and which also maintains the limits of self-narration – like all other frames.

As I have observed, everything is unpredictable within the production process. This is the case for the newcomers as well: they never can predict how many candidates or suitors will come to the studio, how many of them will be accepted onto the show, and how many of them will feel ready to go on stage. In addition to this, the staff have to work on their life stories: what kind of stories are heard on stage on a particular broadcast day? A story must be believable enough not to threaten the authenticity of the candidate, but interesting enough to trigger a *reaction* from the audience in the sense Skeggs and Wood (2012) use the term. If it is not interesting and not believable enough at the same time, the show may lose its truth effect. In addition to this, regarding the marriage show format, it must be a *clean* enough story – in the sense of not airing dirty laundry (Grindstaff 2002) to keep the secrets of the family which may otherwise call the existing family structure into question, as well as maintaining the level of propriety of the subject.

Ahu, one of the guest coordinators, describes the work of framing at this level firstly by appealing to the reality show convention of seeking to maintain a truth effect through the authenticity of the candidate and his/her story: '*There is nothing fake here. Everything*

is authentic, this is our foremost principle'. She continues that they never offend the participants by revealing their secrets during the live show:

We do not offend people on stage after encouraging them like 'honey go go!' If something [extraordinary] happens, they already know it. I mean, we do it in this way, with their consent. And if they don't want to tell [of something], we inform Esra hanım about it. Esra hanım is really responsive in this regard. Even when we tell her that there is such and such a case about a candidate, she sometimes refuses to bring that subject up because it might cause offence. I mean even if we know that we can make a good fist of it, we leave many points untouched in the program because her sense of compassion is overdeveloped. Especially when we know that things people tell in a moment of excitement may do them harm. People coming here may sometimes get excited and lose their control, being carried away with the glitter of the screen. And we do not want to take advantage of such things. We do not have such intentions.

Ahu's account of framing puts an emphasis on not being offensive. Indeed this attitude prevails in staff accounts of the work of selecting and preparing candidates, a common strategy for registering the show as ethical. In Chapter 6 I analysed how they test the authenticity of suitors, while also seeking to maintain *denklik* (equivalence) between the candidate and the suitor, in order not to offend. Finally, they also draw the limits to self-narration, again not to offend the candidates on stage. Thus, the production staff also possess a sense of responsibility regarding the limits of self-narration, which is to some extent in tension with the conventions of producing a reality show, when one takes Grindstaff's argument on seeking *the money shot* as an essential aspect of a producer's work. It is also a prevailing concern that, as I maintained in Chapter 6, the marriage show staff seek in order to distinguish the show from its copycats or counterparts in Turkey; to this end they embrace a discourse on quality programming. I argue that Esra Erol and accordingly the marriage show staff embrace a similar strategy to that of *Oprah* in order to register itself as a program of quality. Framing is used similarly on *Oprah*: her show is distinguished from its competitors in its focus on stories of *failure* which may

subvert ‘the politics of secrecy that is fundamental to the middle-class nuclear family’ (Illouz 2003: 26) with middle-class values and the taste for therapy and self-help as the *limit* to self-narration. What limits, then, are at work in the case of the marriage show?

As I argue in the sections above, the goal of registering the show as a serious, quality and non-offensive program collides with its dedication to marrying people. The work of framing the stories has to follow and maintain the limits of self-narrating subjectivity first and foremost in order to move the candidates to the show on the basis of trust. That is to say, candidates often mention how they feel safe and how they trust the show because it does not force them to *bare* all parts of their stories. In Chapter 4, I analysed in detail how Bahar, one of the female candidates, expressed the basis of her trust in the show as follows: ‘*I said from the beginning that I have things that I don’t want to tell, and they arranged everything accordingly*’. As I have pointed out in several parts of this dissertation, maintaining the gateway to the private sphere is an essential aspect of female subjectivity which not only enables women to move into the show on the basis of trust, but also marks them as proper subjects of marriage.

Yet, I also argue that framing stories involves the work of differentiating between chasing after the *money shot* within a story and the *stories proper*. There is an *affective economy* of the show (Ahmed 2004) which differentiates self-narratives along a spectrum of feelings among which they are expected to circulate. Candidates whose stories are deemed closer to the hegemonic representational scheme of the nuclear family are allowed onto the show as the most suitable marriage candidates – those for whom they are more willing to facilitate meetings with suitors – while stories of suffering and failure are simultaneously sought in order to sustain the melodramatic effect of the show. Thus, for example, the staff endeavours to convince Sevil to participate in the show by telling her, ‘*Sister Sevil, you’re a woman of quality, you know what you’re doing. Lots of suitors may approach you*’ (for a detailed account of Sevil’s story, see Chapters 4-5). On the

other hand, there are other stories that the staff very often label as a ‘good story’ because they think that as a story of misery and suffering it will definitely move audiences. This was most apparent in Pelin’s reflections on a new candidate, as I quoted in Chapter 6: ‘*She is not so nice looking. A bizarre hairstyle and dress... But she has an interesting story. A very moving one*’. Therefore there is no single set of criteria for selecting stories for the show. There is an affective economy at play in the selection of the stories, which attaches different concerns and expectations to every story. The gap between the representation of the proper (marriageable, familial) subject and the everyday realities that were formerly excluded from television representation (see Chapter 2) is filled out through a myriad of stories that are normatively assessed and differentiated within a dynamic spectrum between propriety and the money shot.

It is also crucial to underline that everything unfolds during the live broadcast, and outcomes are unpredictable: a scandalous story may end in marriage while a proper story may fail to reach a *happy ending*. I try to depict the unpredictability of the live broadcast by bringing forward for examination two different stories by female candidates as told on stage.

7.6.1 *Meltem’s Story*

It was the day I visited the studio with a group of students I was teaching. The guest coordinator invited us to sit among the studio audience, perhaps because she could not fill the seats on that broadcast day. After a few seconds of reluctance, I and two of the students agreed to take the front seats. We watched the show there until the next commercial break. It was my first time watching the broadcast from the audience seats and Meltem was the first guest of the day. Perhaps it was because this was a rare case where I was in a position to listen live, since I was usually backstage, but her story attracted my attention. It left an impression on me that has stayed with me since then.

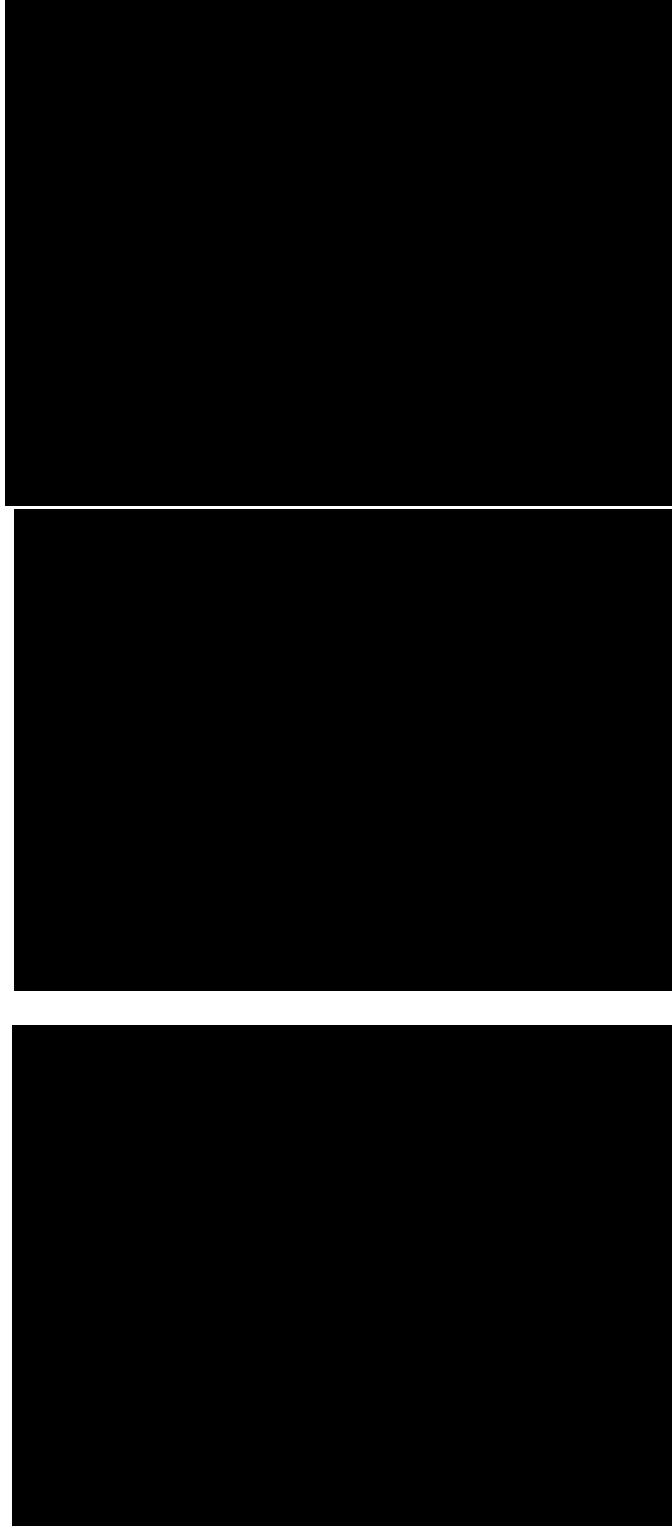


Figure 7-1: Meltem is on stage.

Immediately after we took our seats in the audience the final countdown finished and the orchestra began to play an upbeat song. Esra Erol came to the stage and danced with the music. She saluted the studio audience and read some letters aloud. She then announced Meltem as follows:

***EE:** Meltem, from Bursa, will tell us what kind of a mate she's looking for.*

The female candidates' door opened. Meltem, a beautiful young woman, came on stage amid applause. The orchestra played a cheerful cue. Esra Erol welcomed her, and Meltem took a seat:

***EE:** Welcome!*

***Meltem:** Nice to be here!*

***EE:** Such a calm, such a delicate looking woman [Meltem giggles]. Ok, what were you thinking backstage before coming out here? I mean when the door wasn't yet open and I announced your name.*

***Meltem:** I'm so excited now. I mean ...*

***EE:** You feel like it is unreal.*

***Meltem:** Yes, unreal. I mean, I never considered coming here before. I mean, with the support of my parents and my aunts, and ultimately my daughter said 'Mom, just go to Esra abla [a Turkish word for elder brother, or a respected elder friend]'. So I came.*

Esra Erol's emphasis on Meltem's excitement is noteworthy. In Chapter 6, I described the opening of the doors as being central to the format, which is endowed with the tension of stepping onto the marriage show stage for the candidate. I also noted that the host is part of the tension, standing on the other side of the door as she announces the candidates' names and waiting for them to come through the door. She highlights this tension when speaking to Meltem, making those feelings part of the affective flow of the studio. With this reflection on Meltem's feelings just prior to coming on stage the show extends backstage as well.

In addition to this, she draws attention to Meltem's feelings of excitement while grounding the conversation in everyday realities. This is important in relation to my

argument that the appearance of ordinary people on the marriage show's stage is usually deemed unrealistic by audiences or by a more extended public watching and judging the show. Besides resonating with the pejorative criticism of the show (see Chapter 2), I suggest that Esra Erol's move to describe the situation as *unreal* for Meltem is to reinforce the truth effect of the show: it is a *fact* that the door is opened for Meltem, yet it is the first time it is opened to her and thus it must be something like a dream, a step into a desirable venue which was nevertheless formerly closed to Meltem. From this vantage point, I suggest, Esra Erol's enquiry to Meltem speaks to a wider debate on the show around the question: '*Is it for real?*'.

In both ways, Esra Erol teased Meltem's story. In response, Meltem began to tell of her decision to come on the show, how she was encouraged by her close family members. I would like to refer back here to my analysis of female candidates' narratives about their decision-making processes in Chapters 4-5, and to underline how Meltem also takes a similar register on, locating her *self* among a network of significant others who are included in her own decision-making process. Among these, her daughter's position was significant, and Esra followed up accordingly:

EE: *How old is your daughter?*

Meltem: *She's 10.*

EE: *God bless her [three seconds of silence]. A very young woman, at the age of 30.*

Meltem: *Yes.*

EE: *We're the same age, but you have a daughter of 10.*

Meltem: *Yes.*

EE: *Mashallah. You're from Erzurum [an eastern Anatolian city] in origin, but live in Bursa [a western Anatolian city]. You live with your family and with your daughter. And you married once before.*

Meltem: *Yes.*

Throughout this interaction, Esra Erol provided the audience with clues to the narrative that the show promises them. As I quoted above, she teased up the story by

pointing to Meltem's age and motherhood as a contradiction. That is, when she noted that they were at the same age 'but' Meltem had a 10-year-old daughter, she gave us a clue about marriage at a young age, which is indeed a common theme of the program, as I pointed out in Chapter 6. The conversation continued on the topic of Meltem's previous marriage:

EE: How did it begin and end?

One can assume that Esra already knew the story, and she gave the clues to interesting coverage coming up:

Meltem: How did it begin? It wasn't so nice, so it didn't end nicely. The only nice thing is my daughter, she is the only lovely thing.

EE: You said it didn't begin so nicely. Indeed, a wedding and preparing for marriage should be the most exciting event in one's life, which one waits for with excitement.

Esra Erol framed the narrative again by underlining a contradiction. In this way, she registered Meltem's story as a unique one which diverged from conventional feelings and recognisable memories of marriage. Meltem took this position of *extraordinariness* and went on with her narration:

Meltem: It wasn't the case for me. It was all of a sudden, against my will. So, I feel a bit down when I talk about these issues, so ... [3 seconds of silence]

Meltem trailed off, implying that it was not so easy for her to talk about her marriage. When this caused an interruption in the flow of the show for a few seconds, Esra Erol followed up with another clue, and changed the focus to Meltem's daughter:

EE: Ok. And when you decided to divorce, you found that you were pregnant.

Meltem: Yes. When I wanted to finish, I found out I was pregnant, and in order not to have an abortion, I did not divorce. I had the baby, and I expected everything to be different as she grew up. But nothing changed, and in the end my daughter said 'Let's go mom', I mean, she wanted to leave. Then I decided to divorce. I lived through so many things, but when it came to my daughter ...

EE: *Your daughter?*

Meltem: *I mean he was already violent with me, but when he came to being violent with my daughter, I couldn't bear it, and decided to leave him.*

It was after changing the focus from Meltem to her daughter that *the secret* was revealed: she and her daughter had been exposed to violence during her marriage. I would like to reiterate here that I use the term secret in the sense that I have used it throughout the dissertation with reference to Sirman (2002; 2005): the secrets of the family which women should *dutifully* keep in order to achieve proper womanhood (see Chapters 2, 4 and 5). As Meltem's story unfolded, the secrets of her marriage, which had been kept outside the acceptable confines of *televisual representation*, and thus the acceptable confines of the public sphere, leaked into frame. Violence has the potential to subvert representations of the proper Turkish family. Nevertheless, as I point out in Chapter 6, the feminist movement in Turkey has been raising its voice against violence over its more than 30-year history. Similar to what Shattuc (1997) argues for the talk show genre in the US, I suggest that narrations of violence have shifted from being 'the arm in the sleeve' (see Chapter 2) to being a recognisable public register, especially on television, in the years since the launch of the reality show genre in Turkey. It is also important to emphasise that there are safe limits to the narrative of violence, which become apparent as Meltem's self-narrative continues below.

One aspect of the violence plot in the narrative is that Meltem began to talk about the violence she and her daughter had been exposed to during her marriage only after she registered her daughter as the central subject of the narrative and her life simultaneously. What was difficult to talk about a few seconds ago, when she was the central subject of her narrative, tripped off her tongue when it came to her daughter. This time, a different kind of dutifulness that is also part of proper womanhood came into play: her duty to protect her child (even more than herself) from violence. I suggest that, in this way, she

walked through the safe limits of narrating violence by carefully keeping herself in the periphery of her self-narrative.

It is also important to underline here that, as violence entered the plot, Esra Erol shifted her framing into an emotional register rather than pursue the details of the memory of violence. She picked up sentences which (perhaps) Meltem told to the staff before the broadcast. She looked at her notes in her hand and said,

***EE:** You said you saw the depth of the violence?*

***Meltem:** Yes, I saw the depth of violence. [silence of a few seconds].*

***EE:** You endured for your daughter.*

***Meltem:** Yes, I endured for my daughter.*

The repetitions in the conversation may complicate the audiences' perception of the *rhetor*. The sentence 'I saw the depth of violence' seems to have been selected from Meltem's earlier conversation with the staff, which is quite a complete picture for me as a researcher familiar with the production process. For the audiences, though, it is not so clear: was it Esra or Meltem who spoke the sentence first? In both cases, it is clear that the central subject of the narrative shifts between being Meltem and her daughter. Meltem goes on with her explanation:

***Meltem:** She said let's go. And she is so happy now, she says what a good decision it was. And she wants me to be happy, I mean, she says you have never been happy, just be happy from now on. She is only 10 years old but she is very mature.*

It is because her daughter encouraged her to come on the show and wants her to be happy that she agreed to come. The story is similar to the female candidates' narratives of their decisions to come on the show in Chapters 4-5. As in the case of the registers of loneliness that I traced in Chapter 5, Meltem seeks an anchorage that will provide her a safe pathway to narrate her attempt/desire to get married on the show.

Yet, there is always a twist, or a flux between Meltem and her daughter as two centres of the narrative. Esra Erol changes the focus between the two protagonists of the narrative and pulls Meltem back to the centre:

EE: You are also a woman who grew up at an early age.

Meltem: Yes, I also grew up early ...

EE: Think of how your peers spent their time with trivial things, how they were concerned about small things, and felt lost.

I think the most striking aspect of this ongoing conversation is its focus not on the perpetrator but the victims. Both women speak in calm and relaxed voices, highlighting their strength and resilience and emphasising Meltem's obligations as a mother. Indeed their conversation reminds me of my conversation with Sevil, one of the female candidates, in which we also did not dig into Sevil's past so much except to know she had also placed her children and her role as a mother above her own selfhood, and this was a factor that registered her as a proper marriage candidate (Chapters 4-5). This informs my argument more generally that a proper candidate for the marriage show is one who is able to appropriately navigate the safe limits of self-narration.

What I would like to emphasise here is that, although the conversation between Esra and Meltem resembles a therapeutic form (Shattuc 1997; Illouz 2003), the drama of the narrative resides in the specific register of suffering. Rather than focusing on the sources or reasons behind her suffering, it is narrated as her fate, an abstraction that is external to herself and that pushes her to take her life into her own hands (and thus to become a subject in her own right):

Meltem: I sometimes meet them, and I laugh at the things they are concerned about. Even if there is nothing important, they worry about very small issues. And I ask, what would they have done if they were me? A friend of mine cracked a joke saying 'You wave life like a rosary in your hand'.

EE: You wave life like a rosary in your hand.

It was the first time I had heard this phrase and was really impressed by it. Then I found out that ‘*I wave life like a rosary*’ is a Turkish arabesque song which is performed by several singers, and which has highly sensational and indignant lyrics:

*I wave life like a rosary
I cry when I hear her name
Everybody calls me crazy
I curse all of her nearest and dearest²⁹*

Meltem refers to the song, but with quite a different sensibility. Indeed she does not further explain what the song means to her. Yet I suggest that, at this level of her narration, she became the central subject of her narrative, and the central subject of her life, having accepted and played the difficult hand she was dealt, and having taken life lessons with her as a result:

Meltem: *Because I endured very difficult situations. I mean I didn’t even realise that I had a tumour, due to lots of stress and sadness. Since I had an unhappy marriage, they assumed that it was a nervous breakdown. Whenever I had an attack, they mistook it for a nervous breakdown and gave me tranquilisers and I felt better. In the end I found out I had a brain tumour, and I learnt that it was due to violence and unhappiness. I had surgery last year. A brain operation. They removed it. I endured great difficulties with the tumour as well. I was near death, I was paralysed for four days and then I recovered. I mean, a person lives and faces so many things in life. I mean I say, everything is a test in this world. We live, we face things and I say, I had to live. I never rebelled in my life. I have always been grateful, and I will always be grateful (to God). I mean, this is what I had to live, and I lived it. This was something that I had to learn, and I learnt it. This is what I had to live, and I lived it.*

I would like to read her sentences about her *self*, in juxtaposition with the discourses of self-actualisation in American daytime talk shows according to Shattuc’s study.

²⁹ Hayatı tesbih yapmışım sallıyormuşum
Adını duydukça ağlıyormuşum
Deli diyorlarmış benim halime
Gelmişine geçmişine sayıyormuşum (Lyrics by Tayfun Soydemir)

Shattuc argues that these programs have an ambivalent relationship to human agency. While they take the unconscious as an essential and determinate source for women's suffering, these shows also 'espouse a more humanist approach that implies that the women are able to self-actualize' (1997: 134). In Meltem's case, the discourse of psychology is replaced with a discourse on religious destiny and bowing to life as it comes, without rebelling or resisting. Indeed this is similar to Tekçe's (2004) observation on the narratives of marriage arrangements in Turkey. She points out that the references to fate while narrating the self should be understood as an interpretation of the past, which nevertheless does not prevent the subject from having a sense of personhood that acts on behalf of her/himself. She makes reference to Asad's definition of fate, which may be helpful for making sense of Meltem's reference to her destiny and bow to life:

A Muslim's acquiescence of fate relates to the past and not to the future: it is not a refusal to act, to hope and to improve, but a refusal to consider past reality as anything but an act of God. (1985: 59, quoted in Tekçe 2004)

It is crucial here to see how her acceptance and submissiveness becomes the source of her propriety: because she endured very difficult situations, both emotional and physical, she came up with a story to tell on the show at length, and without any excuses, without any negative judgements. This is what, I suggest, makes Meltem's story a *properly* framed story about a *properly* lived life.

One can notice that, towards the end of her narrative, Meltem extensively uses the first person. She becomes the central subject of her narrative, but not equally the central subject of her life. Similar to women's narratives of their decisions to come on the show (see Chapter 5), she is not the protagonist who resolves conflicts, who fights against an antagonist – her ex-husband in this case. On the other hand, the drama of the narrative resides in the non-conflictual register that Meltem takes on. She does not re-work her past as the subject of therapy by addressing her childhood miseries or socialisation problems,

or a capacity for self-actualisation and survival that she was working on; neither does she pose herself as the protagonist of a melodrama who struggles to defeat a villain who causes her suffering, but as a subject endowed with the capacity to keep her suffering as an asset for her *self* and for building a good life in the future. Even if the subplot of violence unfolds somewhere in the narration, it is nevertheless invested into her subjectivity as her inner strength, and again becomes a *secret*. This time, it is the secret of her endurance; that is, an inherent quality of hers that makes her into an enduring subject, unlike her peers who neither suffer nor know the preciousness of a non-suffering life course.

It is apparent that the narration takes place as a conversation between two subjects. Thus, Esra's position is noteworthy throughout the conversation. As Meltem emerges as the central subject of her narrative, Esra takes on several positions to frame the narrative, and Meltem, as the subject of the narrative:

I don't know who your friend is, but what she says is correct. I here see a woman who, at least during her 30-year life, really waved life like a rosary. Now, this is your time. We listen to you. We look into your eyes. What you'll say is so important. My crucial role here is just to listen, not to tell you something. My mission is to give a chance to those who kept silent, who never expressed herself, never said a word; or those who always talked but nobody heard them, those who couldn't find what they wanted. You can tell me everything, and I will listen to you with endless patience.

It is the third time the ambivalent expression, '*waving life like a rosary*' is repeated in the conversation. Indeed this ambivalence is figurative of the subjects' ambivalent positions as they talk to each other in pursuit of a life narrative. While positioning herself, Esra takes on several positions: a therapist/expert-like position wherein she assesses Meltem's story from a distance, or as a neutral and patient listener, which nevertheless quickly evolves into an authoritative position, opening up the stage to those who were formerly silenced. In this way, she also authors my argument that the marriage show

opens up its stage to formerly excluded masses from her own position. Yet, as seen in Meltem's story as well, it is not an endlessly free space for narrating the self: there are several positions, discourses, and sources, i.e. frames that shape Meltem's story as narrated on the stage, together with the techniques of framing both on and off the stage.

When Meltem begins to talk about her future expectations and her past miseries together, what she says is juxtaposed with her silences as happiness is juxtaposed with violence. These are lessons that she learnt from her past, and as such, they draw a frame around a proper marriage for her:

Thank you. I mean, I want to be happy from now on. I never had a chance to talk to my husband when I was married. I would like to be able to talk to the person I am married to. I would like to share my troubles. I would like to share his problems as well. I mean, I can say, I had moments when I wanted to say something but I couldn't, and whenever I chose to say something, I was exposed to violence. I was escaping. I was quailing. I don't want to be like that anymore.

Thus, the ultimate frame of the self-narrative is drawn through Meltem's desire to get married and be happy. Meltem explains what she expects from the program and from life in conclusion to her narration:

EE: *Who do you expect to appear behind the screen, when the screen is removed, what kind of person do you wish to see?*

Meltem: *I expect a person who is consistent, who is spiritual. They say the heart is a mirror of the face. When I see his face, it must reflect his heart. As I said, I care about neither his appearance nor his possessions. Above all, I care about his personality. He must be at peace with his family, if he likes his family, he will also like us. These are the most important things: he must be a decent man.*

EE: *A decent man. You're 30. You would prefer a man between 35 and 45. And the thing you're most scared of, you say, is nervousness.*

Meltem: *Yes, I am afraid of nervous people.*

EE: *You are afraid?*

Meltem: *Yes.*

EE: *I am a patient and calm person, says Meltem, and I would like to share my life with an honest man who is committed to spiritual (religious) values. You expressed yourself so well. You talk and I will always listen to you.*

Meltem: *Thank you very much.*

EE: *We say goodbye to Meltem with applause.*

She talks about her expectations of her future husband's manners, religiosity, age and familial relations. Esra congratulates Meltem, registers her as a good narrator, and as such, a proper marriage candidate.

Meltem retires backstage to applause and the orchestral accompaniment of a romantic song:

*My black flower, my bare feelings unlivd
My black flower, my springs of love fading away
I couldn't see the day, night after night
Time to go, to fall into blues.*

What is at stake in Meltem's account is that she constructs her propriety by deploying the narrative form in a compelling way. Thus, we listen to a story of success, dutifulness, endurance and religiosity, which could also have been a story of the failure of a single parent and a divorced woman. Thus, as I stated at the outset, propriety is not inherent to the lifecourse and its subject; rather, it is maintained as an outcome of the narratives as told on the stage, within frames that are delicately drawn by the host throughout the conversation. I would like to bring forward another narration to have a complementary perspective on how propriety is related to the *form* below.

7.6.2 Ela's Story

My aim in this section is to show how a life narrative which is not *recognised* as proper in comparison to Meltem's unfolds on the marriage show. My argument is that what makes a story improper is not the *lifecourse* itself, but its performance on stage, which opens up spaces for judgement as the *outcome* of narration and conversation between the candidate and the host. As seen above, Meltem walks the safe limits of *self-narration*, and gives us (the audiences) the impression that she has also walked the safe

limits of a *life course*, first and foremost, by *not* registering herself as the central subject of her narrative. From this vantage point, her account resembles female candidates' accounts of their decisions as I presented them in Chapter 4. Like those female candidates, who do not always fill the position of the subject as they account for their *selves*, Meltem occasionally switches between being the author of her own life and the narrator of a story in which she does not occupy a central position.

The production process of the marriage show, as I maintain in Chapter 6, is defined on the basis of strict normative frames of whose existence counts as life, as well as who can be part of the human circuit of marriage (who can be allowed onto the show as a marriageable candidate). At a larger scale, the marriage show entails normative frames which are invested into *the family* as a regime of truth. However, as I point out above, not all stories that are narrated on stage conform to these normative frames. There are always excesses and leakages, which are enhanced and enabled by the widening of frames that had previously excluded particular people and themes in Turkey within the generic conventions of reality TV (Chapter 2), and specifically within the pace and intensity of the live broadcast. As I argue in the section above, every narrative is framed and differentiated from every other through an affective economy that locates those narratives within a spectrum between representing propriety on one end and capturing a money shot on the other. Meltem's story is closer to the proper end of that spectrum, but many stories told on stage fall towards the opposite end. What I would like to show is that there is an intricate relationship between the form of narration and the judgements applied to it that construct propriety at different scales, from different vantage points and across different narratives. I will clarify my point by bringing forward Ela's story as an example.

Ela's appearance on stage was another case that left an impression on me. It was towards the beginning of my fieldwork that I saw Ela backstage, just before she went on stage for the third or fourth time. She was 22 at the time of her first appearance, and

pregnant with her second child. Although I had not had the chance to interview her backstage, I was already aware that as a single, young, pregnant woman, she was the object of public debate soon after she appeared on Esra Erol's show.

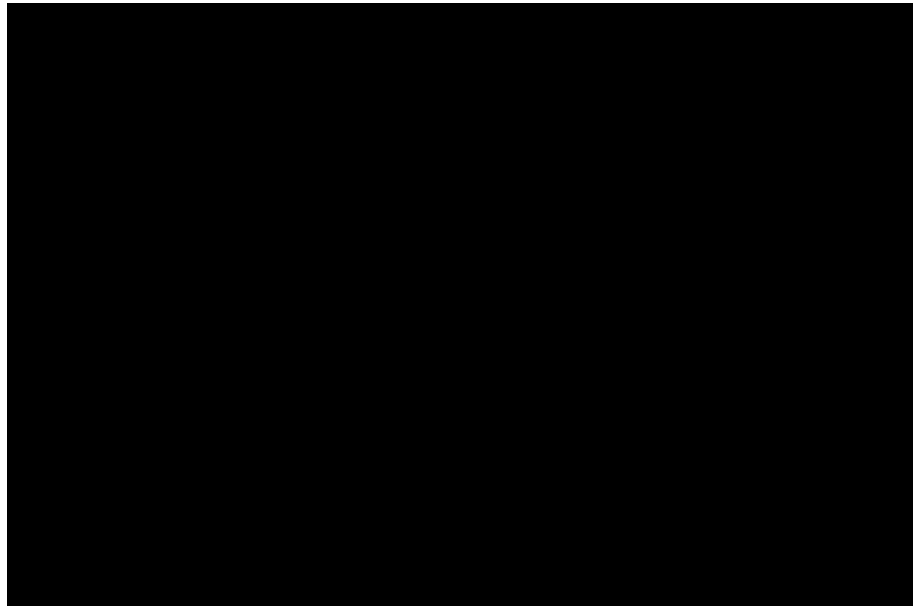


Figure 7-2: *Ela is on stage.*

On the first day of her appearance, after coming on stage, Ela immediately began to talk about her *situation*:

Ela: *I called you on Monday to attend the show. I mean, I guess they told you my situation?*

EE: *[half surprised, half knowing] You're pregnant, aren't you?*

Ela: *Yes.*

Her *situation* – that she is pregnant – is revealed in the very first moment of her appearance. The orchestra plays a dramatic cue. Ela's face becomes sad and anxious, her voice trails off. She begins to cry. Esra seems half surprised/shocked, even though I know – and the audiences could also guess – that she had already heard about Ela's pregnancy. Her questions and silences intensify the drama of the narration, while she goes on guiding Ela to tell her story:

EE: *How many months?*

Ela: *Seven.*

[Esra seems puzzled. 30 seconds of silence in the studio, with the low, sad sound of a clarinet in the background. Esra brings her chair closer to Ela, touches her tummy].

EE: *Don't cry ok, never cry. Now you're seven months pregnant?*

Ela: *Seven months but the baby isn't growing so well, that's why it is not so big. It is only one kilo.*

EE: *What?*

Ela: *One kilo. The baby is so small.*

EE: *Did you go to the doctor, then?*

Ela: *Yes, I did.*

EE: *The baby is only 1 kilo? [she turns to the audience] How big should it be in the seventh month? I don't remember.*

Ela: *This is the case for me. I haven't been able to take care of myself.*

Unlike Meltem's narration, Ela's case is introduced very ambivalently. Indeed neither the baby's health, nor Ela's ability to look after herself, is the central focus of a narrative, given that she is appearing on the show as a candidate for marriage. To put it more clearly, none of these details provides the anchorage from which the narrative will unfold, and through which audiences will come to know Ela as a marriage candidate. Esra Erol, who is compassionate towards Ela from the first moment she comes on stage, also seems confused and puzzled, even if she already knows the main details of Ela's story.

Later on, Esra Erol takes the focus away from Ela's baby, moving to establish an origin story in order to make the narrative unfold more comprehensively:

EE: *Let's take it from the beginning. You're seven months pregnant, and it is out of wedlock.*

Ela: *Yes out of wedlock.*

Esra Erol more clearly articulates Ela's situation: the pregnancy is out of wedlock. Later in the analysis I explore how this anchorage, which may produce a variety of striking narratives, unfolds into one which is structurally complex and repetitive, and which opens up spaces for judgement. In other words, Ela's narration does not unfold into

a conventional life narrative in *form* because it is anchored in and highlighted as a narrative of failure in *content* from the very beginning.

After teasing the story, Esra, as the host and facilitator of the conversation, continues asking Ela questions about her *situation*:

EE: *Where is the gentleman?*

Ela: *He was in Malatya. I don't know where he is now.*

EE: *He was in Malatya, and now you don't know where he is [meanwhile, she gets closer to Ela and gently touches Ela's face to wipe away her tears].*

Ela: *Yes.*

EE: *How long had you been together?*

Ela: *Only one month.*

EE: *Only one month. [She speaks to the control room] Can we raise Ela's voice a little? [She turns back to Ela. 5 seconds of silence]. Can we find him? His mobile phone number, his family's number, his father's, his mother's, his siblings?*

[Ela looks down. 3 seconds of silence]

EE: *I don't understand. I really don't understand.*

Ela: *My life is a real mess.*

Esra unlocks the mysteries and secrets of the story with panic/astonishment in her voice. She repeats nearly every utterance from Ela, moves nearer to her, and ultimately asks that her microphone be turned up so that the audience can hear every detail correctly. What is the secret behind this story that is so full of gaps and mysteries which cannot be easily revealed: how did she become pregnant, how did the relationship begin and end, what kind of a relationship was it? What is crucial is that, just as Ela describes her life being a mess, the narration of her life is also unfolding messily, not following a linear structure, and without a central plot or a central subject.

The host's (the facilitator's) role in the conversation is also noteworthy here. Esra proceeds to ask questions without waiting for the answers, and the answers she *does* receive do not directly correspond to these questions:

EE: Was he someone you were seeing occasionally? I mean did he say ‘we’ll get married’? Did you have a religious marriage contract with him? Why did you go, why were you seeing him?

Ela: Sister, I was in my home, and so bored...

EE: [getting closer to Ela] Yes, you were bored?

Ela: I was bored and going out.

EE: Yes?

Ela: We were married by religious contract.

EE: Yes?

Ela: We were married by religious contract. I mean we made a religious contract. Nothing else. I was going back home in the evening.

EE: You were going back home in the evening?

Ela: Yes.

The repetitions and discontinuities between the questions and the answers can be regarded as a *failure* to build a narrative from the bits and pieces we hear from Ela’s life. Esra goes on asking questions which *seem* to aim at illuminating the backstory. However, this does not proceed as a purposeful search for a narrative and its subject, as was the case with Meltem. Rather, her questions only serve to reveal the impossibility of locating a proper narrative from this mess of secrets and mysteries. While questions like ‘*how long had you been together?*’ or ‘*what was this man doing?*’ are questions with the potential to prompt a coherent narrative; the subsequent questions which I quote below, and which are asked without expecting answers, such as ‘*how is it you couldn’t see him, didn’t you go to the police?*’ are questions that register Ela’s life course as one which will *not* unfold into what can be registered as a proper narrative.

EE: Ok, what was this man doing?

[7 seconds of silence]

Ela: [with a lower, yet angry voice, she looks down] He was selling ice cream.

EE: He was selling ice cream? Ok, then, when did you learn that you’re pregnant, didn’t you go to his place, where he was selling ice cream? If he is selling ice cream, if he has a place, this man can easily be found [she gets a bit tense]

Ela: I went. I went but couldn’t see him.

EE: [a bit nervous] How is it you couldn't see him? Didn't you go to the police? Was he selling ice cream on the streets?

Ela: No, not on the street.

EE: Where? Was it in his own shop/place?

Ela: In his own... I mean, you know there are shops.

EE: Just a second. Did he have a shop/place?

Ela: Not his own place. He was working there.

EE: Ok, then why not go to that place?

[3 seconds of silence]

Ela: I went many times.

EE: How many times?

Ela: Many times, but couldn't find him.

EE: Alright, did you ask the other men there about him?

Ela: There... [1 second of silence] I asked, and they said no, we have not seen him.

[10 seconds of silence. Esra Erol seems distressed. She puts her hands over her face.]

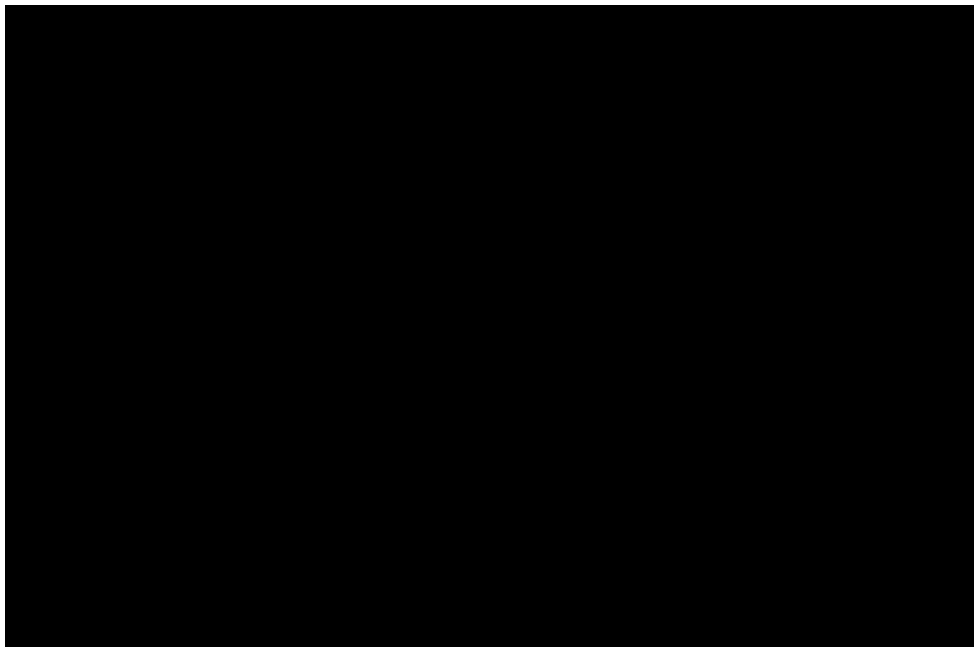


Figure 7-3: Esra Erol seems distressed while Ela tells her story.

Ela's narration is marked through these questions which register the story as a strikingly unrealistic and improper one, as a story of failure. I suggest that besides the content of the narrative, it is also a story of failure because it does not achieve a narrative coherence. As seen above, Esra is compassionate towards Ela, she also interrupts the

narration with repetitions and with questions that don't have answers. I suggest that the gaps, repetitions, silences and nonlinear form allow the intimate public of the show to make judgements while moving across the bits and pieces of the narrative. For example, one of the female candidates from the gallery, who has been listening to the story from her seat on stage, intervenes in the conversation as follows:

Esra hanım, Ela still seems to be frightened. She cannot express herself. Still there is a fear from something. I think she is contradicting herself.

This kind of scrutiny turns *curiosity* about Ela's life into suspicion, which cues the question: '*Is it for real?*' with a different emphasis. As the female candidate's comment shows, the contradictions and silences in Ela's narration are registered as lacking aspects of the story, which are interpreted as extending from her fear. While Esra also enables this suspicion, her suspicion does not take on a judgemental register about keeping secrets or lying. Rather, it is through suspicion that one secret is revealed: a young pregnant female candidate may conceal parts of her story because it is dangerous for her to do otherwise. To put it simply, the secret revealed is that there is a secrecy at play here that interrupts the narrative. Thus, while registering Ela's story as a story of lacking, she is not judged for her contradictions, and she is not registered as an untrustworthy – and moreover a dishonourable/disrespectable – woman. Rather, a story of victimhood is sought in order to make sense of the fragments of her story, and to find a coherent narrative. I think it is no coincidence that Esra looks to another point of anchorage to *follow* another subplot of the story. As I point out in the section above, violence is such a reliable route and anchorage for a self narrative that Esra hints to Ela to start down this path by asking whether she has been exposed to violence. From there, the narrative unfolds as follows:

EE: *Ok. Why did you divorce your first husband? Violence?*

Ela: *Yes, violence.*

EE: Now, how many husbands have you had? [turns to the audiences] She has three husbands. She was married to the first one by religious contract and had a child, and to the second one by civil contract. She does not have a child from the second marriage. The third one is again by religious contract.

Ela: Sister, I thought I could marry [silence for 3 seconds]. Indeed it was not a marriage at all. They actually sold me.

E: Where, to whom did they sell you?

Ela: To Çorum [a Turkish city]. My mother had a neighbour, and she said 'let's marry you', and I said 'ok, ok'. I thought that it was better to get married than to [stay in] this messiness [of my family's home]. Then I heard that they took 2000 [Turkish] liras from the man who married me. Both my husband and my mother-in-law used violence; they were constantly swearing at me [stops for 2 seconds]. We were dining, and they even begrudged me my meal. They were always nagging me. [5 seconds of silence] I have never known love from my mom and dad. Neither from my husband and mother-in-law. It got worse.

[10 seconds of silence]

EE: Girls are not sent to school lest they go off the rails but are married off in the name of saving their virtue.

Ela: They sold me like they sell their animals and took 2000 liras. I don't understand this in the first place.

EE: You're 22 Ela. You're 22. And your life started at 14.

Ela: I was staying in a children's dorm, and my family abducted me from the dorm.

EE: Why did they abduct you from the dorm?

Ela: I don't know. I was exposed to violence in the dorm because of her.

[EE looks confused]

Ela: At last, she abducted me from the dorm. Since then I've faced every misery of life.

EE: Ok, we'll have a break. And then we'll be back.

[The orchestra plays a sad song- Ederlezzi by Bregovic.]

Interestingly enough, as in the case of Meltem, violence seems the most appropriate/safe subplot for the self-narrative to unfold. This time lots of other details – though in fragmented and messy forms – are revealed within the frame of violence: not going to school, being raised in a children's dorm, early marriage, religious marriage contracts, violence, a certain kind of bride price, etc., all of which qualify as constitutive

secrets of the ideal-typical Turkish family (see Chapters 1 and 6). Indeed far from keeping her out, these aspects of her life bring Ela into the show. From this vantage point, violence is another frame that can be registered as a safe limit to self-narration. It is crucial to underline that as the first and foremost agenda of the feminist movement in Turkey, violence is also a register that circulates on daytime television in Turkey. From this vantage point, the marriage show is similar to what Shattuc (1997) argues regarding the talk show genre, which produces and disseminates certain forms of *feminist talk* on television. In the case of Turkish daytime television in general, and in the marriage show in particular, the rhetoric of *violence* can be regarded a safe route for women to publicly narrate their suffering to some extent – though addressing its roots and outcomes poorly – and registering it alongside other elements that can be deemed as *backwardness*. Esra's framing of violence by making a rhetorical connection between lack of schooling, early marriage and bride price is an example of the dominant forms of discourse on violence. Yet I also would like to underline its role in providing Ela an anchorage to explicate of her *self* on stage, within the space of the show, which enhances and enables self-narration while also limiting the judgemental space it opened up through interruptions, repetitions and silences.

It must have been to audiences', as much as my own, surprise that Ela actually married on the show, and she gave birth to her child after the wedding. Later, I watched the footage from the hospital, where she and her new husband were smiling to the cameras with their newborn baby. I still wonder how Ela's life is going, because the suspicion that enveloped me (as well as other audience members) about the odds of Ela finding a good life for herself linger; if she has found happiness in her marriage, surely she must be an exception. It is also crucial to underline that I watched/listened to this narration both as an audience member and as a researcher who looks both for a narrative and for what can be deemed proper/improper by other audience members; thus, I also occupy multiple

subject positions both to understand the story and how it articulates to the frames/discourses of propriety in its own way.

I think this happy ending to a narrative which began as a narrative of failure, and hence as a failed narrative, is noteworthy. Remembering the discussion from Chapter 6, the frames of the show are said to be thoroughly maintained by the staff to avoid inappropriate candidates (young female candidates who do not have their family's consent, or those whose standard of living does not meet a minimum condition). Yet, as one can find in this section, the first part of Ela's performance on stage occupies quite a large portion of that broadcast day, not *in spite of*, but *because* it is a very rare, and thus interesting story, as a tragic story of suffering and failure. That is, if there is a flux of propriety, Ela's case diverges from that of a proper marriage candidate, as her narrative opens up judgemental spaces to the host, as well as to other candidates. When Esra asks her why she came to the show, she answered as follows: '*Just because I think that you can help me*'. From this respect, Ela's appearance on the show is a leakage: she does not have a proper story to tell, as it does not unfold as a conventional, linear narrative, and she does not say that she came to the show to get married – the sole and ultimate aim of the show.

Nevertheless, it is also crucial that she ended up making it through the screening processes and on stage, and in particular that she ended up marrying in the show. Indeed the conclusion of her narrative vividly shows how unpredictable things are on the marriage show: all categories, framings, and analysis of categories and framings that I bring forward here can only partially cover the real-life narratives and their conclusions. Moreover, Ela's story is figurative of how propriety is not the inherent property of a subject and her/his life. Rather, it differentially operates at various levels of a narrative, and at various levels of life, which endows not only the show but also life itself with unpredictability and constant excitement.

7.7 Conclusion to Chapter 7

In this chapter, I have shifted my analysis on frames further, and have pursued the issue of how self-narratives and their subjects are articulated into the normative frames of the show, and as such, the normative frames of marriage/matchmaking. I began by arguing that, while the staff assert that they carefully select candidates and frame self-narratives in order to register the show as a proper pathway to marriage, the stage of the marriage show is open to a variety of participants and their life stories, which may exceed the acceptable confines of who is marriageable/representable. Within this framework, I traced stories about the self on the marriage show's stage, and (hence) within the particular milieu of marriage/matchmaking.

I first looked at how the staff differentiate life stories within a spectrum of feelings that they are expected to circulate. The stories that unfold properly and those that may lead to a money shot are the two poles that I highlighted here. Yet, I would like to emphasise that the stories are not confined to these categories. Every story brings its own particularities, ambiguities and feelings into the affective flow of the show. The question I have sought to answer here is how these stories are variously articulated to the frames of propriety in the show once they are narrated on stage.

Hence, at the second level of analysis, I traced the self-narratives and performances of two female candidates as they unfolded on stage. While handling these two narratives as distinctive, particular stories, I have also grappled with how they construct propriety on the show. I looked at how each candidate deployed narrative form. In Meltem's case, the narrative unfolds in a linear and proper way, which conforms to the framing of propriety as I described it in Chapter 6. Ela's narrative, on the other hand, is fragmented, non-linear and full of contradictions, interrupting the narrative form and allowing

audiences to make judgements while connecting the bits and pieces of her life story, which unfolds into a mess.

I also paid attention to the content of the narratives. In both cases, I tried to show how they deal with the past. In Meltem's case, the past is handled delicately to avoid telling the story of a corrupt and failed life. It is much more difficult for Ela to find an anchorage for the narrative to unfold. Yet, as seen in both narrations, a specific register of violence constitutes the anchorage. While Meltem follows this anchorage in order to narrate her dutifulness and submissiveness to her destiny, Ela's narrative of violence reveals how it is connected more broadly to other issues, like bride price, forced marriage, domestic violence and the religious marriage contract. In this way, the show dynamically bridges the propriety of the subject to the propriety of marriage, by vividly showing its *inside* and *outside* through the myriad of narratives it stages.

At both levels of analysis, I have tried to maintain that propriety is not about inherent qualities of the subjects, but about the outcomes of their narratives on stage and within the frames of the show.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that the specificity of the marriage show resides in its premise: marriage is the most desired conclusion to all self-narrations on stage. What is striking is that every narrative is framed in its particularity, and every narration is performed in its unique way. One can never predict if a particular narrative will conclude in a marriage or not, and this is the ultimate *reality* of the show as a reality show format. All in all, every narrative fades away as a new one is brought forward for the excitement of the audience.

CHAPTER 8: FRAMING THE TEXT

In their study of time in reality television, Kavka and West argue that liveness is an effect of reality TV in particular, and in all other factual programming in general (like news or sports programs), in which ‘showing *seems to* happen concurrently with the viewing’ (2004: 140, emphasis added). Most of the globally renowned reality show formats (*Survivor*, *Wife Swap*, *Big Brother*, *Pop Idol*, and many others) are compiled from edited content and thus not aired live. That is, as Kavka and West puts it, reality show production is based on collapsing a whole day of living into a short transmissible episode, and inserting it into the domestic setting of television viewing (2004: 139). Delays, empty hours and leakages are manipulated by collapsing time and severely editing the raw footage. Accordingly, the reality show creates a ‘zone of liveness’, within which viewers are connected to each other by their simultaneous consumption of the episodes, which feel as if they are occurring at the time of broadcast (2004: 140). As a result, the truth effect of reality television is coupled with intimacy and immediacy as forms of closeness between the participants and the audiences who inhabit the same zone of liveness:

Reality TV pursues intimacy (emotional closeness) through immediacy (temporal closeness), coupling the proximity of the ‘here’ with the urgency of the ‘now’ (Kavka & West 2004: 137).

Although there are taped and edited reality show formats in Turkey, studio-based live formats constitute a substantial portion of the daytime schedule. As I describe in detail in Chapters 6 and 7, the marriage show is a studio-based daytime program aired live. Erkan, who is a senior staff member working in the call centre, answers my question about his opinion of the live broadcast as follows:

F: What is the impact of the live broadcast on the show’s popularity?

E: They feel intimacy in the live broadcast, the audience members efficaciously feel intimate. I mean they directly call and comment on the show. I don’t think that

taped programs are as good. They may be themed, adventurous shows like Survivor, which cannot be broadcast live, or which wouldn't be interesting enough in that case. They may be more attractive when taped. But I think the daytime shows should be live, the audiences must feel free to participate by fax, phone, internet.

Unlike the pre-edited formats that Kavka and West describe, the marriage show is a three-hour live stream from the studio. It is a slice of a whole-day flow of people and activity in the studio building. Only a small part of the show is edited from taped content (footage and teasers). Thus, the technical framing practices (the practice of mediation) are concurrent with the actual (immediate) framing practices in the studio building during the live broadcast. The immediate movement of people is concurrent with the affective movement of television audiences, who watch the show and either call and participate and thus become part of the immediate movement/flow, or who enjoy the program and invest their time in the show. I argue that the liveness of the marriage show enhances immediacy as an effect, and intimacy as an affect, that keeps those who are in the human flow of the show close to each other – the audiences, the candidates and the staff – in a simultaneous flow of the live broadcast and the audiences' everyday routines. This is what I describe as the intimate public of the show in Chapter 6. The temporalities of the viewing audience and the candidates are bridged through live calls, live music, and the spontaneous participation³⁰ of suitors/candidates (if they are available and in Istanbul) during the show. Therefore, the 'zone of liveness' that Kavka and West (2004) describe is not confined within the audiences' everyday lives as an effect; rather, the effect is produced by the concurrency of the live stream with these lives.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I elaborate on how the marriage show is produced as both a popular TV program *and* a pathway to marriage. I focus on how the conventions of the

³⁰ In some cases, a suitor may be connected to the show via live call, and if he/she is available, he/she is collected from home and brought to the studio.

reality show genre and the conventions of matchmaking merge to produce a distinctive and popular television format. I would like to underline here that, like all other television programs, the marriage show seeks high ratings. The producers aim to lure audiences into choosing the marriage show from a variety of programs which make up of the daytime flow. They want to move the audiences, first of all, towards the screen and engage them as listeners, as viewers, as commentators, as testifiers who will provide information about candidates/suitors, and as candidates/suitors. All of the production activities assume the existence of and address an imaginary audience that occupies and moves across these positions. So, each time the director selects a shot, or the orchestra plays music or a sound effect, the foremost aim is to tempt audiences to turn their eyes and ears towards the screen with excitement, joy or whatever feeling will capture and keep their attention. Then how is the ultimate text of the marriage show, which is produced according to various normative schemes merged under the rubric of ‘format’, and which moves audiences towards screen, framed? In this chapter, I will dwell on the production of the ultimate text which is transmitted to home audiences, with the aim of analysing the reactions generated at various levels.

I focus on two main elements of the text: the picture and the music. I think Obert's (2008) shift of focus from vision to sound is noteworthy here. She suggests tracing the aural relationship between the audience and the televisual text, arguing that ‘television participation proceeds primarily on aural (rather than visual) levels’ (2008: 410); accordingly, television ‘must be theorized as ‘a multisensory phenomenon’ in order to appropriately account for its embodied affects’ (2008: 411). Obert refers to Altman’s (1986) seminal study, which draws the sensory pathways through which the television set moves the audience to particular forms, and into particular positions of viewing/auditing television. Distinguishing between ‘attention time and eye contact time’ (1986:42), Altman argues that audiences do not necessarily participate in the show by actively

watching the show/reading its text; instead, they revolve around, keep an eye or ear on, and move across different levels of the viewing experience. The sound of television aims to anchor what he calls the 'television flow' to the 'household flow' (Altman 1986). Obert builds her argument on Altman's (1986) pointing to the ratings system, which is based on 'keeping the sets on rather than consistently engaging an audience' (2008: 412). Accordingly, the (ultimate) text aims to move the audience across different levels of viewing, no matter how she engages with the text across different positions in the house or other viewing environment. In line with Altman (1986) and Obert (2008), I think this quality of ratings system opens up a pathway through which one can analyse television as a centre of attractions and movements, which are propelled by a set of aural and visual elements. Altman's differentiation between sound and image – and in line with this, Obert's criticism of image-centred approaches to television and her privileging of sound – provide me a chance to shift my analytical focus somewhat and explore different levels of vision and sound. I use an extended notion of text produced at the moment of viewing, which holds aural and visual elements together in a flow, through which the audience will move towards the show, move towards paths of participation.

In my analysis, which focuses on the production process, I seek to answer the following questions: How does the production team expect to anchor audiences to a particular text at a particular time? How does the production staff go about attracting audiences to the marriage show? In this last step of my description of the marriage show format, I will be concerned with the end product, the outcome, the text as a multidimensional, multisensory text which fills the home setting through various flows of images and sounds. Looking from the production side, I aim to trace the framing of the televisual text as transmitted to home sets with the aim of moving the audience between 'eye contact' and 'attention' (Altman, 1986: 42), and from attention to participation. I describe two elements of the show respectively: the image and the sound (music) through

which the television show *leaks* into the home setting and becomes part of a daily rhythm. What kind of production techniques are deployed to this end? What is sought to propel their participation at various levels – as audience member, as commentator, as candidate, as testifier, as fan?

8.1 Image

The frame of the television screen, which contains the **image** transmitted to the home audience, is one among the frames of the marriage show (Chapter 6). This frame is materially fixed in the home space and it is redrawn at each moment the director chooses one among five or six pictures being transmitted from the cameras around the studio. These cameras shoot the people, their faces, their bodies, and their movements in and out of frame, then transmit those images to the control room, where they are processed and transmitted to the receivers. From this vantage point, the production of the image is another phase in the framing of the show, and the framing of its subjects. Like other framing moments I analysed in Chapter 6, all of these technical moments of selection and preparation of the image involve engagements with norms. ‘What will be transmitted to television sets?’ is a normative question about shooting and choosing the appropriate picture on the producer’s part. Then, what constitutes an appropriate picture?

In this section, I will first address how the appropriate picture – one which is expected to move the audiences (towards the show) – is selected and transmitted. Second, I will discuss the implications of the rapid pace of picture selection in the production setting, which takes place concurrently with the viewing of the image. The director draws and enacts the normative confines of what will be transmitted to the home setting but has to do it with a speed which makes the (normative) work of selection (almost) imperceptible during live stream/viewing. I will elaborate on these two points respectively by focusing on my interview with the director, who is based in the control room deciding which picture will be transmitted to home sets.

Zeynep, the director, describes her work as follows:

I normally do not intervene in the flow... For example the producer and the studio director send information about who will come on stage next and I set my cameras accordingly. It doesn't matter who is coming on stage, whether Ahmet and Ayşe, or Mehmet and Fatma, because I [only] master the visual part. I mean what is crucial to me is just to show the most appropriate picture of who is coming [on stage].

The director's task is to choose the most *appropriate* picture at the right time as framed by the cameras, according to the flow, within the pace of the live broadcast. She sits in the control room and quickly decides which picture will be transmitted to the home audience. Then, what constitutes an appropriate picture? When I ask her this question, she answers as follows:

If there is anything that violates RTÜK law, like anything containing commercial advertising or something that shouldn't heard by the audience. As you see, there is equipment here which delays the broadcast 3-5-7 seconds according to our preference. If somebody gets angry or swears, I push the button and the broadcast is silenced or a 'beep' sound is activated. I control this. Or if something goes wrong and the network asks us to wrap the issue up or intervene in the flow, I inform Esra hanım about it.

Zeynep points out that she makes a normative decision about the image whenever she commands the cameras, chooses the picture and pushes the bleep button. She addresses several normative schemes, namely the RTÜK law, audience expectations, and conventions of television broadcasting like '*point of view, looking room and the 180-degree rule*' as norms of television broadcasting that direct her selections and commands. Further, she unpacks the qualities of the format which shape and direct her decisions about picture selection:

There are various people here. There are many people in the candidate seats, around 30-40 women and men backstage, who come on stage one by one. There is an orchestra that accompanies the flow. The studio audiences are never frustrated,

they can participate in the show whenever they want. And there is a very active host. All these are implicated in my work; they already tell me what I have to focus on. [My task is] to see what is happening and show it immediately. A belated picture is an insignificant one, it is effective when it is transmitted on time.

The director re-defines the format characteristics that I addressed in previous chapters, this time in terms of image production: liveness, focus on the ordinary/personal, and audience participation, which register the show as a specific reality show format. On the other hand, I was astonished when I observed the director's work in the control room: she was choosing one shot among six every two or three seconds, while at the same time commenting on or sometimes even mocking her own choices in between. It was at that moment that the changing of pictures became visible to me at the expense of watching the show. It is speedy because the multiple cameras shoot multiple subjects, who simultaneously invest in the show through their movements, speech, performance, and facial expressions that relate to the event taking place on stage. The studio audience, the guests, the orchestra, and the host, and their encounters on the stage, are the focal points that constitute the image on the television screen. The director sometimes changes the picture very rapidly, and sometimes uses split screens in order to cope with the pace and simultaneity.

I suggest that the juxtaposition of normativity with speed produces images that stream onto the screen during the live show. What I emphasise here is that the director simultaneously tries to show the routine, the human flow of the show according to format characteristics, genre conventions and the conventions of matchmaking, and does so with a speed that will generate a movement that crosscuts these frames. This movement opens up the possibilities of myriad new images sliding on screen, and while being framed similarly, still anchoring the audience to the screen with the excitement of watching a

new and unexpected scene. I will elaborate on this point using some examples from the show.

The director often uses close-ups, which she describes as a stylistic choice, though, as we know from studies on other reality show formats, this is a prevailing form of shooting/framing in the reality show genre in general. She addresses this prevalence by equating her stylistic choice with the audience's choice:

Like the artist's brushmark, I also have a style. For example if there is someone crying, I track her tears and choose close-ups, her hands, I mean her excitement, her playing with her face... Same for someone who is in stress: some stomp their feet, some move their hands and arms, some play with their jewellery; and in the meantime others listen, respond, the host's respond... I mean, what I pay attention to is 'what would I like to see while watching the show? I show what I would like to see.

The director claims that what moves her also moves the audience (and vice versa). Using facial close-ups is a widespread technique that also shapes Zeynep's choices. Why are the close-ups so touching? Skeggs and Wood refer to close-ups as one of the 'techniques for person performance' (2012: 63) that produce intimacy. That is, facial close-ups constitute 'a particular invitation to judge' (2012: 127) because their selves are exhibited rather than their positions as reality show participants. Close-ups bring participants' bodies closer to the audience, and 'enable bodies and gestures to come under close forensic scrutiny' (2012: 63). As such, the level of true emotive response is judged as part of person performance.

Remembering that the marriage show is framed as a pathway to marriage, I suggest that close-ups have a specific function in relation to judgement and intimacy. During the live broadcast, whenever the candidates talk, the camera zooms in for a portrait, leaving half the screen to be filled with captions. The close-ups aim to make the audience see a particular candidate, while the captions provide a brief description of her/him. Besides

triggering audience judgement, it is expected that these candidates will move viewers, whether by emotionally identifying with him/her or potentially attracting a viewer to him/her romantically. Closeness becomes an aspiration for intimacy enhanced by mediating techniques that suspend the frame of the television screen for a few seconds for a particular candidate and the potential suitor, paradoxically, by deploying frames (split screen, close-up, captions) that are drawn to cope with the speed of liveness. Thus, the frame is still there as much as the forces that shape the appearance of the candidates are there, drawing the boundaries of what qualifies as a marriageable candidate. At this point the director's choice of what is interesting, moving, charming, funny, emotional, etc. becomes a normative decision of who will attract audience members to become future suitors/candidates.

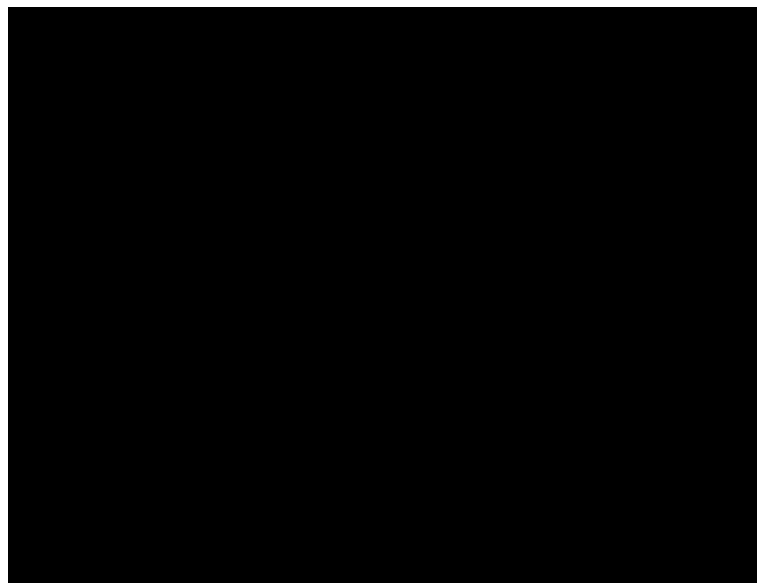


Figure: 8-1: Facial close-up with captions.

Thus, as I pointed out above, what moves the director is also *expected* to move audiences. At a larger scale, there is another aspect of the director's choice besides creating what she would like to watch: provoking a reaction from the audience. Accordingly, as Skeggs and Wood argue, close-ups are expected to guide the judgements

and reactions of viewers to ensure they are ‘emoting properly’ (2012: 66). Within this framework, the closeness of the face, allowing emotional responses to be read by viewers, also call them to make judgements on the question ‘*is it for real?*’, which will determine the possibilities for becoming part of the same affective flow and human flow of the show, and, at a larger scale, the human circuit of marriage.

I would like to reiterate here that all these take place within the pace of the live broadcast. The facial close up is a spectacular as well as a temporary closeness: the face becomes bigger and closer than an ordinary face on the television screen and fades away a few seconds later when the camera moves towards another subject and the director picks up another shot. The picture changes in a few seconds. In this way, the spectacular ordinary remains ordinary, a mediated ordinary, to re-arrange Kavka’s (2003) concept of ‘mediated intimacy’: the candidate is among a crowded group of people who constitute the content of a TV show through five-second appearances, and who call audiences to the show during these short intervals.

Thus, the normative limits of who/what can appear on screen are drawn through the director’s speedy movements, which is almost imperceptible for viewers. Yet despite this speed, she has managed to find time to explain her choices, as I witnessed on several occasions: ‘*This is our main actor, we should show him more often*’, or capturing an extraordinary moment with the exclamation ‘*Gotcha!*’ etc. Image production is crucial for producing a flow that connects the production and the viewing environment through which audiences are (expected to) move into the show (as active viewers, callers and candidates). Liveness and pace propel this flow, which extends from the studio to the home setting through the movement of images, sounds and people. It is also crucial to note that image selection is a tool for re-drawing the frames that become invisible on stage as well. By following the host, the cameras sketch pathways along which to gaze

at, judge, come closer to or remain distant from the human flow of the show, without the mediation of the host.

8.2 Music

I pointed out that sound is one of the sensory pathways through which audiences are called to participate in the show, ‘much as one hails a cab or as a phone's ringtone impels us to answer’ (J. G. Butler 2012). The marriage show is, like many other television formats, a polyphonic text which uses several techniques to hail and to be heard by audiences. As Obert (2008) puts it, television has an ‘acoustic ability to align social and biological time – to ‘re-sound’, that is to say, the world in the ‘home’’ (2008: 409). From this vantage point, we see the show is selected from the daytime schedule and kept on to the extent that it aligns itself with ‘the household flow’, to borrow from Altman (1986), by being listened to/heard.

In this section, I will follow the acoustic pathway through which the show produces proximity and distance between different subjects. As a polyphonic text, the marriage show contains a variety of sounds, among which music has a particular role in setting the rhythm, connecting the segments of the show, signifying the emotions, and accordingly, capturing the audience’s attention. In the following section, I will trace the specific aspects of the marriage show as a matchmaking format: what do the audiences of this specific format hear when they listen the show – what does it have to do with marriage/matchmaking?

8.2.1 Musical Frames

The orchestra which entertains the audiences during the show has several functions in relation to the framing process. It physically frames the show, being positioned along the contour of the stage, just to the left of the host. The camera occasionally selects and

zooms in on the orchestra as they play, usually accompanied by the host's dancing. Music and dance thus register the program as an entertainment format.

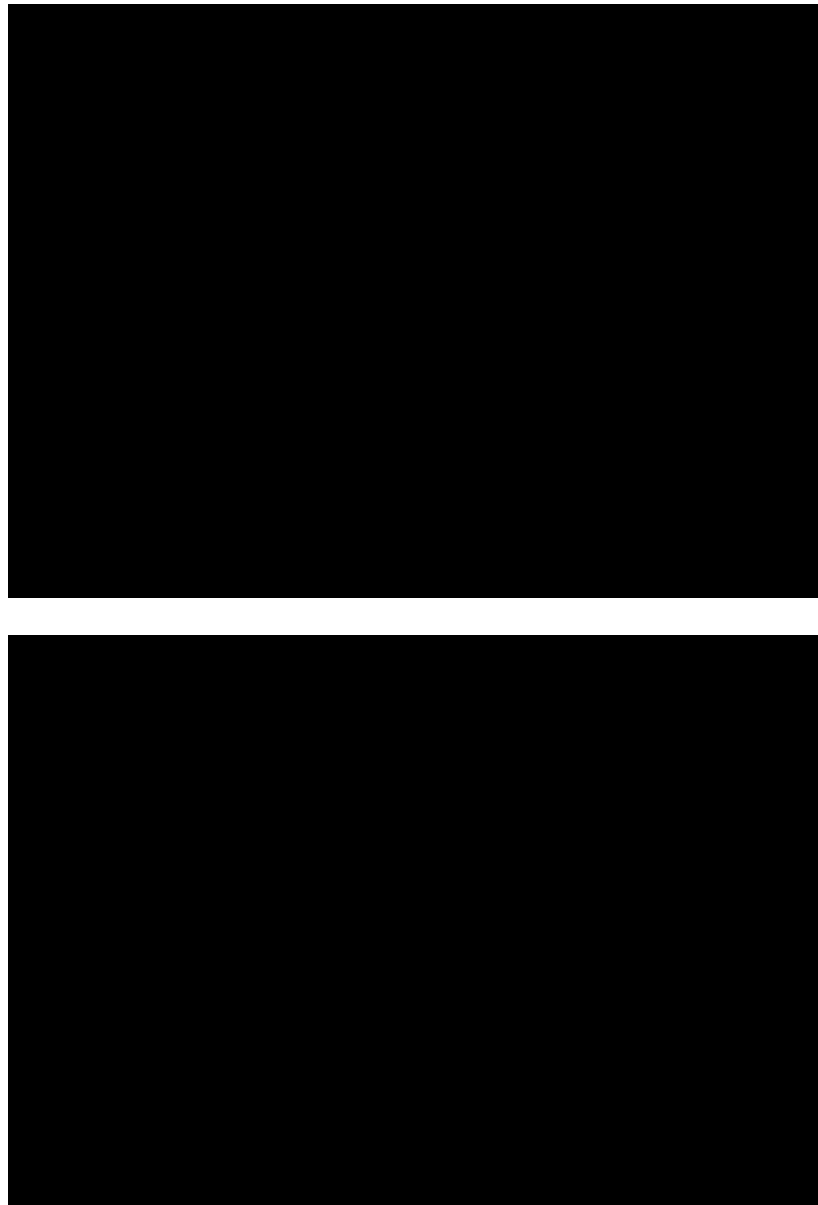


Figure 8-2: The orchestra from different angles

Yet, I argue that music has several functions in the show that exceed *mere entertainment*. What does the orchestra do in the show, always filling the studio with music, playing loudly or softly on cue throughout the live broadcast? There are almost no moments of silence in the studio during the show.

J.G. Butler (2012) points to the role of sound in maintaining the television flow by providing a temporal continuum. The sound (several forms/levels of music or musical effects, cues, laugh tracks, and so on) connects the segments of a television flow so that the editorial cuts and discontinuities are concealed (Butler 2012). In the case of the marriage show, music draws the temporal frames, and as such maintains the programmatic flow by providing passages between the temporal segments as well. Music marks the entrances and exits of candidates and suitors, as well as the breaks during the live broadcast. After the countdown, the studio director marks the beginning of the show, the orchestra usually kicks off the broadcast with an upbeat song, and the host makes her entrance. The audience cheers and claps while the host dances and sings the song together with the orchestra.

Melih, the conductor, distinguishes the orchestra's role in the show from other television programs: '*We are one of the very few orchestras that is integrated with the program in Turkey; the others simply do their job*'. What he means by *integration* is that they play according to the particular moment of the show, i.e. according to the particular stage of matchmaking being performed on stage. During the live show, the orchestra plays a different song for every entrance and exit: the entrance of the candidates/suitors, the openings of the folding screen, and after candidates announce their decisions about whether or not they will go out with a suitor. The music also plays loudly whenever a commercial break ends and the show comes back on. Thus, the timely musical cues at moments of entrance, exit and passage are one of the constitutive characteristics of the format that frame the text.

The orchestra also plays *cues* to highlight emotional moments/passages in the show. I think its purpose of providing short bits of music in moments of emotional puzzlement or crisis is noteworthy. It works quite differently than Butler (2012) describes it: rather than providing continuity between segments, the cues mark the end of an emotional

episode/segment, preventing it from overdetermining/occupying the flow. While hailing the participants of the show (the audience, the host, and the candidates) to particular positions to participate in the show at various levels, the music also draws the frames/limits of *feeling* for a particular episode. For example, if the time remaining for a candidate to share her/his self-narration is running short, or if a moment of crisis between candidates is dragging on, the orchestra may play a short music cue to let the host and candidates know the scenario needs to reach a resolution shortly. Such musical cues elaborate all sorts of emotions expressed on the show, from anger, to laughter to compassion, and so on, but also set limits on those feelings. The music accompanies the subject of a narrative and an encounter, then fade out as new candidates/suitors come on stage on cue. Thus, when the music rises, a particular segment ends, the candidates' microphones are muted, and music changes the mood, bridging this segment to the next as the candidate and/or suitor leaves the stage.

This is the case for Meltem's performance, as I discussed in Chapter 7. Throughout the long segment covering her tragic story, the orchestra played dramatic music and cues. At the end of the narration, though, the mood had to change and they had to move on to a more *ordinary* story of a male candidate, who wore a red trousers and announced that he liked to do housework. Thus, after sending Meltem off with a sad song, the orchestra switched over to a joyful upbeat song, and the intimate community of the studio began to joyfully and humorously chatter about the appropriateness of a male candidate wearing red trousers to the program.

8.2.2 The Repertoire

As I maintained throughout the analysis of frames (Chapters 6-7), wherever there is a frame, there is an inside and outside. Music as a temporal and spatial frame separates the rhythms of the outside and inside, the sounds of the outside and inside, and the affectivity of the outside and inside, and thus constitutes the *spectacular* sound of the

ultimate text. Yet, as in all other instances, the frames call the outside in as much as they keep it separate in particular ways. Just like the techniques of image production, the production of music in the space of the studio functions in order to mediate intimacy among the participants and the audience as parts of/parties to the same flow, which crosscuts the representational frames and opens up pathways for the audience to participate in the show.

Music is one way to transgress these frames and connect the human flow. It carries outside voices into the show, and the inside of the studio to the viewing environment so as to produce and mediate intimacy between the audience and the performers, and among the performers (the candidates, the host and all other participants of the show). As Misha Kavka puts it:

For the participants on such shows, intimacy is mediated by performance (they must first do as though they feel), while for the viewers' intimacy is mediated by the television screen itself (2003: 95).

The music is a tool that mediates intimacy, bringing different subjects closer to each other, and closer to 'a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way' (Berlant 1998: 281). In Chapter 7, I elaborate on how individual narratives turn into narratives about both oneself and others. Here, I will bring the musical repertoire into the analysis, to show how it seeks to communicate the narrative in a particular way. Describing the orchestra's role in the format, Melih creates a set of qualifications:

The thing that distinguishes us from others is that we watch the show. For example, if I get bored, I notify Esra with a melody or I may ask her to change the topic. At least, I mean, it is not that I can change the topic but she lets me change the topic. Because, as viewers we feel the pulse of the people, and she takes it into account.

First, he positions the orchestra at the centre of the show, proximate to the host, and with the ability to intervene in the flow. Like the director who states that she shows what she wants to watch, Melih also aligns the orchestra with the audiences. Located at the edge of the stage, they watch the show like the audiences, so that Esra takes their perspective into account. They are thus part of the human flow of the studio, as well as the affective flow of the show, communicating the audience's feelings into the show musically. He describes this affective proximity to the audience as '*feeling the pulse*'. It is through this feeling that they frame the show by bridging/mediating affects between inside and outside, between the production and viewing environments, across the human flow of the show.

I trace the mediating role of music by focusing on the repertoire of the orchestra, which is made up of popular songs which set the everyday rhythms of entertainment/leisure in Turkey. My commute to the studio averaged more than an hour, during which I usually tuned the radio to popular music stations, and indeed I very well recognised the lyrics and melodies that accompanied the most significant moments on the marriage show – the entrance of a candidate on stage, the announcement of whether a couple would continue dating or break up – in the soundscape of my drives through Istanbul. For the orchestra's repertoire to be constituted of popular Turkish songs/standards already integrated into the rhythmic repertoire of everyday life is for the show to be bringing in aspects of the *outside*. The orchestra selects songs on the spot depending on the situation they are accompanying. Melih says this spontaneous approach to scoring the show was his idea. I ask him how they decide which song to play so quickly: '*Just one of us decides*', he says, '*we have a list of 30-40 songs, categorised as positive and negative, and we choose one*'.

To share an example of how the spontaneous selection of popular songs works during the broadcast, the folding door often opens to songs of love and passion:

*Where were you, my angel of fortune? You're heaven-sent
This is the best episode ever, lay with me and let's watch*³¹
or

*Come on my love, say yes to me my love
Don't make me die from longing
Come on my love, say yes to my love
Enough is enough, upset me not*³²

If, after meeting on stage the candidate and suitor decide to continue talking outside the studio, the orchestra will quickly cue a cheerful song full of passion and hope:

*Come to me, close close to me
May God take my life for your eyebrows
Wish I hold your hand, hug you from the waist
Oo, you, the bride of our house*³³

If, however, either the candidate or the suitor decides against meeting outside the show, a song about romance lost is cued:

*We can't remain friends,
Know that it will be imperfect
then finish it*³⁴ or

*This-a-way and that a-way
Our hearts couldn't find a way*³⁵

When there is a wedding ceremony, they play a romantic song for the couple's first dance, for example a famous one composed by Sezen Aksu:

*Welcome, you came like a gift.
I hope it will last for life, not for a glance.
I hope you'll be the last*³⁶

³¹ Şans meleğim nerelerdeydin, tam zamanında geldin. En güzel bölüm başlıyor yanıma uzan seyredelim.

³² Hadi yârim bana he de yârim, hasretinden öldürme beni. Hadi yârim bana he de yârim, sararıp soldum yeter üzme beni.

³³ Gel gel yanıma, yanı yanı başıma, kurban olam kaşına. Tutsam elini, sarsam belini evimizin gelini

³⁴ Kalamam arkadaş git, madem yarımısın bari bit.

³⁵ Bir o yana bir bu yana tutmadı hiç kalpte rota.

³⁶ Hediye gibi geldin, hoşgeldin. Seyirlik değil, ömürlük olsun. Dilerim bu defa son olsun.

Sometimes, while a candidate is sharing her/his life story, the orchestra may play a song at the background that captures and comments on the narrative. For example, while Meltem, the candidate whose appearance I discussed in Chapter 7, was narrating her intriguing and touching story, ‘Black Flower’, a song of grief, was being played in the background:

*My black flower, my bare feelings unlived.
My black flower, my springs of love fading away*³⁷

These popular standards are able to signify particular emotional moments within the context of the show because their use follows the same system of terms, conventions, and emotions through which they punctuate Turkish life outside; in this way, the orchestra translates feelings into the recognisable/plausible emotions of a love scene. With every entrance, exit and passage in the live flow of the show, the music *signifies* the phases and conventions of *usual* matchmaking and love relationships, and the emotions/feelings attached to these phases and conventions. It is crucial to underline here that the candidates live several phases of a conventional love relationship in a few minutes during a broadcast segment, including meeting, exchanging gifts (usually flowers, perhaps a poem), asking personal questions, flirting, and deciding to meet again. Unlike reality show formats like *Big Brother* or *The Bachelor/Bachelorette*, where participants perform intimacy on an ongoing basis as the show gradually unfolds (Kavka 2003), the courtship/matchmaking experience is accelerated on the show, and compared to other media forms such as television dramas, its representation is condensed.

What I would like to underline here is that, as I argued in Chapter 7, every appearance and every story told on the stage carries out its own singularity, which generates feelings and attracts the audience’s attention in its own way, yet in a

³⁷ “Kara çiçeğim, yaşamadığım çırılçıplak duygularım. Karaçiçeğim, yok olup giden sevda baharlarım”

recognisable form. I would like to reiterate my argument that melodrama is a form which endows those stories, episodes and appearances with recognisability. Yet, there are also differences. In the melodramatic narratives of television serials, romantic relationships incorporate a complex range of norms and affects that bring two people closer together or tear them apart; these implicate ambivalences, confusions, and indeterminacies (Akınerdem 2005; Rofel 1994). The norms/conventions tell them what will happen when people become closer or more distant, and how to resolve these ambivalences; meanwhile, affects reposition them relative to each other. On the marriage show, though, everything is framed according to a pre-determined flow and the rules of the format: the folding door opens, the candidate and suitor meet on stage, they try to get to know each other in a few minutes by asking questions, and they finally decide to spend some time together, which could lead to dating and ultimately to marriage.

There is little time to perform these phases of a relationship at their normal pace during the live broadcast. The lyrics of the songs, in this sense, name and demarcate these phases, while also communicating developments in the matchmaking venture to the audience. Audience members, in turn, have another sensory pathway through which to follow the matchmaking process unfolding on their television screens as candidates/suitors move across the different phases of their participation in the show (for them already a much longer process that began when they called the show to express their interest in coming to the studio to meet a stranger on stage).

8.3 Conclusion to Chapter 8

This final analytical chapter on the marriage show as a reality show format has been dedicated to laying the groundwork for making sense of a show intended to move its audience to enthusiastically participate as listeners, as viewers, as commentators, as testifiers who will provide information about candidates/suitors, and as candidates/suitors

themselves. As I have tried to demonstrate, the *liveness* of the show provides immediacy as an effect and intimacy as an affect that enable them to move across these positions at various levels of the production process.

Thus, I have discussed the show as a multisensory text that is produced and consumed concurrently, and I focused on music and image production as two components of the ultimate text. First, I focused on the techniques of image production, which are extensively deployed in other reality show formats, yet which work towards additional purposes specific to the concern for registering the show as a legitimate pathway to marriage. For example, close-ups, which are common to TV formats which seek to prompt audiences to assess participants' emotional states, are endowed with a concern for moving the audiences to feel close to the participants: to be part of the same human flow, and to participate in the show, either as a suitor for that participant or as an independent candidate.

Second, I traced the sensory pathway carved out by music, which provides a temporal continuum within the show. Marking the moments that candidates and suitors enter and exit the stage, the musical cues also set the limits of feeling and emoting for a particular stage of the matchmaking process. Feelings are framed through a recognisable symbolic language that was inherited from melodrama, and condensed to conform to the pace of the marriage show.

All in all, I suggest that the marriage show is a charming, entertaining, popular TV show which produces various aspirations, desires, attachments and feelings through its production and viewing processes. Noting that audience research is out of the scope of this particular study, I have provided a brief account here of how the show seeks to move its audience into various positions across the frames of the show, making them part of both its human circuit and the human circuit of marriage. What is striking for the marriage show is that it merges melodramatic emotions with everyday expectations, while also

entertaining its audience with a multisensory text which is produced and concurrently watched live three hours per day, five days a week.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

This study of the marriage show is an endeavour to bring together various approaches and concepts pertaining to television on the one hand, and subjectivity on the other hand, with the aim of comprehending the marriage show as part of the contemporary ways to *make a life* out of the narratives, images and forms made available through television. More specifically, I locate the marriage show within several *temporalities* that fold into its production. One of these temporalities is the *intense present* of the production process of the show, which entails the selection and preparation of participants, and the regulation of their timely movement along with other components of the live show (the flow, the music, camera movements, and so on). Second, it is *the everyday lives* of the audiences who move towards the show to call in or otherwise participate, or to view and judge the show. Third, it is *the life courses* of the participants (candidates and suitors) who are motivated to appear on the television screen with the aim and desire to get married. Finally, it is *the temporality of the nation-state* at large, which has been a trajectory of cultural production over a century of making the Turkish nation and its subjects.

At the outset of my analysis, in Part I, I began by locating the marriage show within the trajectory of television in Turkey. I argued that television production opened up a space for articulating subjectivities in new forms after the widening of the frames of state television in 1991. Since then, a myriad of forms and their contents have flooded onto screens with the introduction of commercial television. Yet, I also argued that the television industry produced subtle forms of framing and delimiting the possibilities of articulating subjectivities, after encountering the dangerous edge of self-narration. As I maintained throughout the thesis, keeping the actual forms of domination and violence in the family as the secrets is one of the constitutive duties of proper national subjects in Turkey. Sirman's (2000b, 2002, 2005) studies on the making of the modern nuclear

family in Turkey shows how the family in Turkey is formulated as a regime of secrets. The proper national subjecthood is assessed according to a proper performance and speaking about the family as a place of peace and serenity, which was the case in state television programs in Turkey, before commercialisation. The new forms of telling the self, which are produced after commercialisation during 1990s in Turkey, which can be regarded as a certain level of democratisation, also triggered a crisis in 2005. After a series of killings and suicides which took place after the victims' appearance on women's talk shows, towards the second decade of the 2000s (Çaylı-Rahte 2009) the television industry began to search for *safer* formats. It is within this context that the marriage show was formulated as a new venue, where self-narration is both enabled and delimited. **I suggest that marriage show is a *successful* format, which opens up pathways for the audiences to narrate their autobiographies and to invest them into the value circuit of television. In this way, the television industry found the way of achieving maximum profit by minimising the *dangers* of showing what has been silenced, kept private and secret. I argued that the marriage show format can be regarded as an outcome of this endeavour.**

Thus, one of the key findings of this study is that, the marriage show is one of the television shows that opened up a space for articulating subjectivities in a specific way, by re-arranging the forms, narratives and images that constituted the basis of proper national subjecthood in Turkey. To explore how this space is used by its inhabitants, I located the show within the life trajectory of its participants. In Part 2, I explored how the marriage show enhances and enables self-narratives as a form of expression. At the first level, I looked at how audience members become candidates who desirously attend the show to get married, and traced female candidates' narratives of their decisions to come on the show. I particularly focused on their assessments of the show on the basis of *trust*, and their rendering of their decisions on the basis of *loneliness*. I argued that the register

of trust in candidate accounts points both to propriety (marriageability of the subject), and to their efforts to achieve that propriety (a good marriage) by a safe pathway (the show). What is lacking in the subject, and thus what will be completed through a good, proper marriage, is articulated through the register of loneliness. What I have tried to show is that loneliness both imbues the subject with a sense of *self* and enables her to narrate a story about her *self* within limits – i.e. safely – in pursuit of a marriage which will cure her loneliness, and subsequently *moves* her from her position as the central subject of her life in exchange for a proper place within a family.

Therefore, I would like to mark the second finding of this study: **the space for articulating subjectivities is filled with subjects' feelings, expectations and their needs pertaining to marriage.** We can conclude that these are delicately framed through the registers the marriage show made available for the audience. Trust and loneliness are two predominant registers among others, which enable the female participants to articulate their desires, their sexuality, their longing for a partner in a specific and *safe* way. In this way, the show enables the female subjects to construct themselves as trustworthy and respectable women.

The next step of my analysis is the participation process with a specific focus on the marriage candidates and suitors in the show. Specifically, if the marriage show is considered to be a safe pathway to marriage, then the question is how it maintains safety and therefore elicits trust from its participants while addressing their loneliness by prescribing marriage as a solution. In order to answer this question, I explored the ways and forms through which the show enables and frames subjects' personal narratives, their feelings, and their bodies. Thus, the third temporality as I formulated above is the intense present of the show, which shaped Part 3 of the dissertation. In Part 3, I traced the candidates' pathways throughout their participation in the show, beginning with their phone calls to the show, extending all the way to their final appearance on stage. By

deploying the concept of *frame*, I investigated how the format is produced through normatively framing candidates/suitors as marriageable subjects, while also registering the show as a quality program which is *seriously* dedicated to marrying people within the norms and conventions of marriage in Turkey. Female candidates' appearance, dress, past narratives and future expectations are delicately *framed*, and finally judged within the intimate public of the show. Therefore, I have shown how the marriage show's frames particularly work for shaping and delimiting what it enabled at first place. **Namely, female subjectivity, which has always been under construction as part of the making of the proper family, and consequently making of the nation is re-drawn by deploying new production technologies and techniques. In other words, these techniques and technologies seem to open up a space within which women perform and narrate themselves as agentic subjects, while also closing up this space by deploying gender normativities as the basis for producing them as marriageable subjects.**

The next question is, if self-narratives are normatively framed before the show, how then do these narratives and appearances elicit judgement? This can be better understood with reference to Butler's definition of frame. She underlines that, besides being a normative scheme, the frame can be understood as a prison break: 'a certain release, a loosening of the mechanism of control, and with it, a new trajectory of affect' (2009: 11). In a context where television has been under scrutiny for showing what was formerly kept private or secret, candidates temporarily break certain norms by deciding to come to the show in the first place, entering into normative negotiations with the show's staff and ending up in the marriage show's flow in order to find a marriage partner. I suggest that the show itself is a leakage in the sense that it is a new conventionality of matchmaking, and its flow is not so easy to step into for candidates. Besides, there are always multiple norms at play: the norms and conventions of matchmaking may also contradict each other.

As a result, there are different ways of articulating the self, which open up spaces for judgement.

To trace how the self-narratives elicit judgement, I described the performances of female candidates on stage. I showed the **affective economy** in the show, according to which self-narratives are selected, framed and judged. Yet, every story carries out its own particularity within the show, which endows it with unpredictability and liveliness every time its frames are opened to a new candidate and her story. Every narration is performed in its unique way and every narrative fades away as the next one brings new excitements to the audience. Nevertheless, in the end, what the show promises is the *possibility* of a happy ending. That is to say, the ultimate need, desire and aspiration that the show produces and assigns to the individual is *marriage*. **In this way, I showed how the self-narratives which are delicately formulated within an *individualistic* register indeed operate at the level of the *social*, re-investing the subject into the family as the ultimate form of intimacy.**

Therefore, what I have wanted to maintain throughout the dissertation is that **proper subjectivity in Turkey can be understood first and foremost through its orientation towards the family as the ultimate desire, ultimate norm, and ultimate form of the social organisation of life, which will ultimately produce the proper national subjects. The marriage show is a technology that make this connection between the desire of the subject and the propriety of the nation, by making the subject's orientation towards marriage part and parcel of the 'value circuit of reality television', through an individualistic register of the self.**

In the final stage of my analysis, I located the show within the everyday of its audience. I suggested that the marriage show is a charming, entertaining, popular TV show which produces various aspirations, desires, attachments and feelings through its production and viewing processes. Noting that audience research is out of the scope of

this particular study, I have tried to grasp these aspirations by looking at how the show itself seeks to move audiences into various positions. I provided an account on the frames of the ultimate text, namely the visual and auditory frames of the show, to demonstrate how it seeks to position the audience across frames, making them both part of the human circuit of the show, and the human circuit of the marriage. What is striking for the marriage show as a television format is that it merges melodramatic emotions with everyday expectations, and connects them to wider public debates, while also entertaining its audience with a multisensory text produced and concurrently watched live three hours per day, five days a week.

At a larger scale, taking the marriage show as a node on the trajectory of Turkey's nation- and family-making processes, I have tried to show the relationship between subject making and the changing forms, narratives and images that shape the televisual terrain in Turkey. These changes can be better understood within the context of ongoing transformations and fluctuations in Turkey. As I emphasised at the outset of the dissertation, the marriage show's endeavour of widening who/what is representable corresponds with a huge flux at other social (and political) levels in Turkey and in the Middle East, which generates debates and tensions on the definitions of proper citizenship, subjecthood and institutions of intimacy. The family is at the centre of the policy-making processes of the existing government, as well as being a site of struggle between secularism and Islam, nationalism and Kurdish liberation movement, and different models of development (neo-Ottomanism, Westernisation, Islamic conservatism and Kemalism). At every instance the folding screen is opened to new subjects and new couples in the marriage show, a debate on being a good parent, a good husband, a good wife is refreshed, in line with the public debates on the education of children, the role of the families in the sustenance of the economic system, the organisation of urban life according to conservativist agenda of the government, and ultimately the possibilities of

‘living together’ after more than 30 years of war between the state and the Kurdish liberation movement. As I tried to depict throughout the dissertation, the marriage show is both a product of and a venue for the negotiations over ‘a new life’ in Turkey, which are certainly *not* devoid of huge tensions and crises. **In this study, I aimed to show the forms of speaking about a new life at the individual/familial level, which constitute a starting point for understanding the ongoing transformation, flux, and crises in Turkey.**

I would also like to emphasise that, at the theoretical level, while looking at television production from a subject-centred perspective, I have deployed various concepts collaboratively throughout the dissertation. More specifically, I have demonstrated that television has acquired new forms of production and use, along with new participatory forms of programming, which I have explored with the concept of *mediated intimacy* ((Kavka 2003; Tyler and Gill 2013) – a newer concept which very often replaces the concept of representation (Skeggs and Wood 2012). By deploying the concept of frame, I have tried to show how television can and does generate both forms of uses at once from the production side. Within this framework, this study can be regarded as an endeavour to call representation and its theoretical baggage back into television studies, to be used in new and creative ways in alliance with the concepts of affect and intimacy. In other words, I suggest that the concept of representation, which came to be scrutinised in media research is *still* a necessary and useful analytical framework, which can help us to trace the politics of subject-making through narratives, images and techniques that are made available through television, while also tracing the affective flows that both *follow* and *transgress* the frames of television. Further research on the audience side of the audience-television relationship (which is no longer a two-sided relationship in the case of participatory formats, among which the marriage show is a clear example) can open up new pathways for creatively using the concept of

representation, along with the concept of **mediated intimacy**. While deploying the concepts of frame and leakage, I wanted to show how the television frame is still expected to operate as a system of signification that distinguishes the represented from what/who it represents, while the widening of frames complicates this distinction. As a result, every time the doors are opened to candidates/suitors, who come from their *ordinary* lives (which are usually outside the realm of representation in Turkey), the show is judged as being unrealistic. More specifically, I wanted to demonstrate how television production seeks to generate affective flows that move people across various spaces, practices and feelings, while also operating as a space of representation where *the real* is represented by selecting and framing the multiple/everyday realities.

I would also like to underline that, throughout the dissertation, I have reflected on my own feelings, reservations and identifications with various subjects of the show as much as possible. Acknowledging Lewis' argument that 'self-reflexivity requires that we take the risk of revealing the secrets and secretiveness that may be powerfully present yet remained silent' (2010: 214), I tried to push myself to provide a self-reflexive account which has been written by finding *a* pathway through a mass of data, along with recording the impressions that the show and all its sounds, visions, movements and narratives have left on me. Nevertheless, I also would like to note that self-reflexivity does not only help us to trace secrets and secretiveness. My writing may occasionally sound reserved and timid, for the sake of *not* crossing frames and intervening in the flow with my presence. The flow I use here is not only the flow of the show, but also the flow of women's (and a few men's) lives that I timidly asked informants to narrate for me. It is perhaps because I was aware of and cautious about these frames that I preferred to find my way to tell a particular account of the marriage show by deploying this concept and other related concepts.

Yet, the show has already intervened in my life, not only by shaping my approach to television, but also by providing me with a new network of people who work in the television sector, a new pathway to the television studios in Turkey, and new questions: I began to think on how to bridge the gap between the feminist movement in Turkey, which is largely organised on the basis of a total rejection of the family and family-oriented life, and the women whose lives, desires and expectations briefly gain publicity on TV as they pursue marriage before fading away as the stage is opened up to the performance of *other* lives. In other words, the experience of researching and writing about the marriage show has been a starting point for thinking about feminist interventions on the mediated lives of women in Turkey, with no clear answers yet in my mind.

It is crucial to emphasise the fact that the show does not ultimately have the capacity to realise its promise of being a safe route to marriage, given other systematic alliances that leave women vulnerable. I recorded the killing of a former candidate in Chapter 4. She was killed in August 2014 by a two-time divorcé she had met and married on the show. The incident clearly shows that the women's demand to feel safe is a matter of life and death for them. Besides being the tragic ending of a woman's life, the event triggered public criticism towards the marriage show: '*this is what you expect if you trust someone you meet on the show*', '*how can Esra Erol take on the responsibility of marrying people on the show, given that three women per day are killed by men in Turkey?*' were two common criticisms that circulated around social media, discussion programs and feminist email groups. It was also one of the most insecure moments I experienced regarding my arguments in this dissertation. Yet as I conclude just a few months after the incident, and as I wrap up the writing just a couple of hours before I go out to participate in a women's march against the attempted rape and murder of university student Özgecan Aslan, I would like to say that sexual violence and other crimes against women remain prevalent,

urgent and complicated problems that are neither caused nor resolvable by television formats that (re)produce marriage and family as the norm. The everyday of Turkey is endowed with grief and rage against these crimes, as much as it is with entertaining television formats. Yet I also think and hope that the marriage show has the potential to broaden the frames for questioning the gender regime, which is partly maintained through its very production process. This potentiality resides in the questions that I addressed above with no clear answer: how to produce a bridge between the lives of women who seek and expect safety on the show with the politics of crimes against women? How to enable a leakage of feminist politics into the show's frames?

I began my analysis at the very outset by scrutinising the pejorative criticism of the show, which is condensed into the question: '*is it for real?*'. I would like to finish the dissertation by offering a tentative answer to this question: While there is a huge literature in the social sciences that has established the notion of reality as constructed, what mostly struck me from the first moment I embarked on this study was how real the show was compared to other venues of life where *some* people enjoy the privilege of making judgements on the *realness of others*. Throughout the thesis, I tried to locate myself as a contradictory subject among all, as a feminist who is interested in television, a feminist who is both critical of the family, while also critical of the total denial of the family as a form of intimacy, and who thinks that there is a way to go in order to find how to fight back the actual structures of domination, inequality and violence that is caused by the existing normativity of the family.

APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES³⁸

Position	Pseudonym	Age
Host	Esra Erol (real name)	
Director	Zeynep	
Studio Director	Mina	
Program Coordinator	Pelin	
Editor (footages)		
Editor (script writer)	Melih	
Guest Coordinator	Gönül	
Guest Coordinator	Banu	
Guest Coordinator	Ahu	
Guest Coordinator		
Call Centre Coordinator	Erkan	
Head of the Orchestra	Melih	
Production Assistant	Miray	
Audience Coordinator	Meral	
Audience Coordinator	Nevin	
Transportation		
Hairdresser		
Esra Erol's guard		
Female Candidate	Ayla	48
Female Candidate	Bahar	23
Female Candidate		29
Female Candidate	Ebru	22
Female Candidate	Zehra	60
Female Candidate		40
Female Candidate		20
Female Candidate	Gül	63
Female Candidate		56
Female Candidate		20
Female Candidate		43
Female Candidate		69

³⁸ I anonymized all the names of the candidates and the staff throughout the dissertation. I only call the host with her real name, as a famous television person and the brandname of the show.

Female Candidate	Melek	50
Female Candidate	Nida	36
Female Candidate		54
Female Candidate	Sevil	45
Female Candidate	Zerrin	41
Female Candidate		23
Female Candidate		30
Female Candidate	Ela (not interviewed)	22
Female Candidate	Gazel	21
Female Candidate		25
Female Candidate	Meltem (not interviewed)	30
Male Candidate		50
Male Candidate		29
Male Candidate		38
Male Candidate		28
Male Candidate		42
Male Candidate		35
Male Candidate		52
Male Candidate		40
Male Candidate		26
Male Candidate		25
Male Candidate		30
Male Candidate		40
Male Candidate		40
Male Candidate		28
Male Candidate		25
Male Candidate		46
Male Candidate		31
Male Candidate		77
Male Candidate		52
Male Candidate		66
Male Candidate		44
Male Candidate		50

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